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JOHN STUART MILL

BY
MARY AGNES HAMILTON

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JOHN STUART MILL was born in London, of Scottish ancestry on his father's side, in 1806. He died in 1873. Subjected by a remarkable father to a remarkable education—learning Greek at five and grappling with philosophy at twelve—he was, in his early twenties, writing in the leading reviews of the day, political and economy articles of a radical turn, which had a great effect. His *Logic*, his *Political Economy*, his *Liberty* and his *Representative Government* established him as one of the leading thinkers of his day. When he ceased to be a civil servant, he was, in 1865, elected M.P. for Westminster and as such fought tirelessly for the Emancipation of Women, and was also the staunch upholder of Trades Unionism. Gladstone called him "The Saint of Rationalism": his *Liberty* has been described as the Bible of Individualism; but in his autobiography he called himself a Socialist, and in many ways his writings helped to lay the foundations of Socialism, and to make Socialists, in Britain.

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JOHN STUART MILL

CHAPTER I

MR. MILL

'QUESTIONS may now be addressed to the candidate.' A brief pause. Then, from the back of the hall, full as it can be filled, not too brightly lit and much too hot, a man rises. By his dress, he is, like the majority of the audience, an artisan. In his hand he holds a leaflet, which he raises, so that all may see.

'I have here a paper, supplied by the other side. In it is set out that the candidate has stated that the working men of this country are liars.'

A silence, in which the proverbial pin might have been heard to drop.

'The exact words here printed are:

> 'Of the few points on which the English as a people are entitled to the moral pre-eminence with which they are accustomed to compliment themselves at the expense of other nations, the one of greatest importance is that the higher classes do not lie; and the lower, though mostly habitual liars, are ashamed of lying.'

'Will the candidate tell us whether he wrote this?'

For a moment, silence again: a tense, almost a fearful silence. The chairman, pale with anguish – or the heat – glances apprehensively at the candidate, who is already

on his feet, looking directly at the crowded faces lifted up to his. A tall man, thin, broad-shouldered; the head, on which the fine hair is growing back from the lofty forehead, is nobly aquiline in cut. In feature, a cameo-like countenance, so clear and sure its lines: but the complexion is ruddy, the skin healthfully smooth, the keen eyes vividly blue. There is a faint twitching of the eyebrows: a purely automatic twitching; no sign otherwise of nervousness: none in the clear, dry voice, audible right to the back of the hall, in which he says:

'I did.'

With that, and no more than that, he sits down again. Hardly are the challenging words out of his mouth than the entire meeting, all the working men thus libelled as habitual liars, break out into loud clapping of hands and stamping of feet. Used to evasions from candidates, this courage, they feel, is glorious. Soon, George Odger, Secretary of the London Trades Council and a leading Trades Unionist, is on his feet. 'My class has no desire not to be told its faults; we want friends not flatterers.' Before they disperse, they have pledged themselves to do everything in their power to secure the return of Mr. Mill as representative of the City of Westminster in the House of Commons.

George Odger might have told the meeting, although he did not, that the candidate who libelled workmen as liars had also been the first man to urge that workmen should come forward as independent candidates for Parliament. In 1857, he encouraged George Joseph Holyoake to stand for Tower Hamlets. In 1870, again, when the Liberal Government refused to amend the law about Trade Unions, he encouraged George Odger to stand for Greenwich, as an independent Labour

candidate, in opposition to Liberal and Tory, and gave him active support. To a friend who complained that the presence of workmen M.P.'s would 'lower the parliamentary tone', and criticised Odger's manners and morals, while admitting that he had 'considerable mental vigour', Mill replied that to have workmen as members of the House is

> 'indispensable to a sufficient discussion of public interests from the point of view of the working-class which, assuredly, is not less worthy of being considered, nor has fewer truths mingled with its errors, than the point of view of other classes, now so super-abundantly represented in parliament. The "parliamentary tone" does not seem to me to be at present so elevated as to be in any danger of being lowered by the admission of such men as Mr. Odger into a House a majority of whom seem to me to be abundantly endowed with all the characteristics you assign to him, except the "considerable mental vigour" for which you give him credit. The result I should expect from bringing contrary prejudices face to face and compelling them to listen to one another would be a great improvement on both sides; and the working-classes are not those who have shown least willingness to be improved by such collisions.'

This was in 1870, when with three and a half years' membership behind him, he knew 'the parliamentary tone' from personal contact.

He had been invited to stand before 1865, but refused. In 1865, the Westminster committee put pressure upon him; it was a great radical stronghold, and a very special constituency, with a distinguished history. Out of a sense of public duty, he consented. He told his supporters, in advance, that he would not canvass himself, or have anybody canvass for him; he would spend

no money on the contest, and none in the constituency; he would not address meetings, until the last week of the fight, when he would attend to state his views and answer questions upon them. Of these answers, his 'I did' was a typical specimen. If elected he should, he declared, devote no time to purely local interests. His own programme, in which a main item was the grant of the vote to women, was such that a distinguished literary man of the day said that the Almighty Himself would stand no chance of being returned upon it. Returned he was, however, by a large majority. His statue in the Embankment Gardens commemorates his association with Westminster, which he represented in the House of Commons from 1865 to November, 1868. He was returned, of course, mainly by the enthusiasm of his working men supporters, although few of them had votes at the time. They had pressed him to stand because they knew his reputation. When they got to know him personally, they felt that he was greater than that reputation. They liked him. They felt they could trust him.

Mr. Mill, as he then was and to the end of his life remained, with nothing before or after his name, was, by 1865, one of the justly famous men of his time: known and admired not in Britain only, but on the Continent and in the United States. His first book appeared in 1843; within less than twenty years, it and his later works were textbooks in the Honours School at Oxford, and studied by all serious students of politics, economics and philosophy. But his was not merely an academic influence. He was the steady friend of every Liberal cause, at home and abroad; the friend, active and practical, of human freedom, never afraid to speak and to speak truth. George Brandes, the great Scandinavian

critic, includes two Englishmen in his *Creative Spirits of the XIXth Century*, Swinburne and Mill; when he received a visit from Mill, in Paris, he felt, so he records, as much honoured as did the soldier whose ears the great Napoleon pulled. Merezhkowski – than whom no man could have a more different outlook and background – has hailed him as 'one of the noblest representatives of European culture'.

Sixty years have passed since his death. We can know him only through his writings, his friends' report of him, and his portraits – portraits taken late in life, which Brandes held to be a travesty of his true physiognomy. Some of his letters have been published, but no sufficient biography of him has, as yet, been written – a fact that suggests that Mill, nowadays, is assumed to be out of date. For Socialists, many would say that he was never in date; more would assert, in general terms that, in the twentieth century, there is no point in writing or reading about a Victorian radical and rationalist. The labels are unattractive: they suffice.

Do they? Do they tell the whole story? Has Mill really nothing to say to us? It is going to be urged, here, that, above all for Socialists, the reverse is the case.

The argument, of course, has to depend mainly upon his writing. That writing is not, at this date, too easy to read. His style, despite a vivid phrase, here and there, which stabs the attention, has neither supple grace nor easy mastery over the mood. It is overloaded with relatives and odd punctuation marks. It seldom soars and as seldom tries to do so. But no reader of more than a page can miss in it that quality of truthfulness which the working men of Westminster felt in 1865, to which they responded.

Here is a mind vigorous, free, frank: keen, but never cold. Here – agree or disagree with what he says – is that rare thing, perfect fairness; a candour that refuses nothing and keeps nothing back, in most unusual conjunction with an enthusiasm burning with sure unwavering flame. To read Mill is to be in contact with an intelligence of the first order, which cuts through the sloppy, the flabby and the merely sentimental and annihilates the taker of words for things, but cuts, always, in order to make, not break. He never dodges; he always states the whole case, points against as fully as points for; he never leaves his own opinion in doubt, or omits any of the stages in the process by which that opinion has been reached. His is a wholly realistic intelligence, and a completely unconventional one. Not a trace in it of Victorian complacency.

It belongs, of course, to its period. He believed in historic development, at a time when few did; but he could not foresee its course. His concern, in the main, is with ideas and forces that are independent of period, and when the modern reader least agrees with him, he will find himself confronted with a case that has to be met. Nor are his ideas as old-fashioned as many suppose. Let those who ask what he has to do in a series dedicated to the foundation layers of Socialism recall that he was the first British writer of accepted standing to treat Socialism with serious respect, and assign to it a commanding importance. Let them remember, further, that he shook the very foundations of the 'classical' economics of his day when he, first, proved that Distribution did not rest on immutable laws, quasi-physical in character, as was then taken for granted, but was an affair of human will, alterable so soon as men

willed to alter it; and, second, when he publicly threw overboard his own earlier acceptance of Ricardo's theory of the Wages Fund. His political contribution was hardly less significant. Because he believed, with passion, in freedom of action and of thought for everyone, he saw, and showed to a previously blind generation, that the vast majority of men, and all women, were in his day, suffering from a denial of that freedom. For women and for working men he fought, tirelessly; against privilege, in all its forms, as against the vulgar gospel of getting on, he fought, as tirelessly.

He was, of course, a democrat. He did not like 'strong' men, and would have seen little but slackness of will and sluggishness of mind in our hankering after dictatorships. Some of his bright expectations from political democracy have been falsified; are not the things he wanted and we want to be achieved rather by its fulfilment, in the economic sphere, than by its rejection and the substitution of force for reason and consent? In any event, his work cannot but help any free mind to a genuine judgment. We have to meet in the path of progress somewhat different lions; but lions remain, and the need to fight them. In that fight, it is still true that 'One person with a belief is a social force equal to ninety-nine who have only interests.' Our age is so far like his that it, too, is one of 'loud disputes but generally weak convictions'. He had strong convictions. They are good to meet, even if we do not share them.

The man and his works are of one piece. George Brandes describes his presence as 'pervaded by a quiet nobility and perfect self-control'. He says that whereas the impression made by an author on one who has hitherto known only his work is often disappointing, he

never knew a great man 'in whom these impressions were so thoroughly harmonious as in Mill. Most authors are far inferior to their books. In him, no such inequality existed, for he was the very incarnation of truthfulness.' He says that when he visited him in London, he never stood before the little wicket gate of his house in Blackheath 'without a feeling of joyous anticipation', and never closed it behind him 'without a sense of having been intellectually enriched'. That sense of enrichment can be derived, even to-day, from a renewed contact with the writings which, in Mill's case, are the man. To some extent, too, it comes from any plain narrative of the facts of his life, uneventful and undramatic as is that record of steady and faithful service.

CHAPTER II

HIS FATHER'S SON

JOHN STUART MILL was the child, not so much of his time as of the special background against which he grew up. His father was the biggest factor in his make-up, and his father was a supremely active member of a highly opinionative and very effective political sect. From his cradle, he breathed argument on public questions; as soon as he could utter words, they were words suitable for newspaper leading articles.

In time, he was born in the black year, 1806; the same year in which Elizabeth Barrett opened her infant eyes, to find a father the most important fact in her environment, if a father of a very different type from James Mill. Except for these two, 1806 was not a great year in the calendar of wonder children, but, in the years just round it, they cluster thick and fast. Thus, Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas were born in 1802: in 1803, Hector Berlioz: in 1804, Disraeli, Richard Cobden, Sainte Beuve and Johann Strauss: in 1807, Kossuth, Longfellow and Garibaldi: in 1808, Napoleon III: and, in 1809, Abraham Lincoln, Mendelssohn, Darwin, Tennyson and Gladstone. Thackeray was five, Dickens six years younger than Mill: Comte eight and Carlyle eleven years older. These were to be his major contemporaries.

1806 was a dark and stormy year: the year of the

defeat of Prussia at Jena and the hurling by Napoleon of the Berlin Decrees at the nation of shopkeepers; the year in which first Pitt died and then Fox. The period that followed, during which John grew from babyhood to manhood, is among the most difficult in our history. The long war ended at last, in 1815, in the 'Peace without a parallel', but, as in 1918, peace brought unemployment and distress to add to the sufferings already caused the workers by the new industrialism. Desperately, the dispossessed hand workers began to smash the new machines, and so encouraged the Government in repressive measures, born of sheer fear. The country had never been so rich – or so poor. The new rich were determined to occupy the seats of authority, still held by the old landed aristocracy: the new poor fought a defeated battle for their miserable lives and those of their sacrificed children. The struggle was partly political, partly economic. On the political field, thanks to an alliance of manufacturers and artisans, poets and economists, a victory was won: in 1832 the famous Reform Bill was passed. It, however, merely set in power the 'higher and middling orders' who, according to Macaulay, were 'the natural representatives of the human race'. They were certainly the representatives of the operative religion of the day – the religion of successful business, against which the Chartists fought a defeated battle. Of this religion, the prophets were economists, like Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus, who, in varying tones, proclaimed economic laws absolute in their rigidity: to interfere with them was, at best, futile, at worst, dangerous to the body politic. The authority of the economist begins at the turn of the nineteenth century; it still lives on.

The teachings of the economists were effective partly because they were expounded, in books, magazine and newspaper articles, and personal conversation, by an extremely able and close-knit group of men, bound together both by community of outlook and by personal friendship, which gathered round the personality of Jeremy Bentham. The Benthamites, whose fighting captain was James Mill, in many ways resemble the Fabians of three-quarters of a century later. Their views were different enough: but, like the Fabians, they influenced both opinion and legislation, to a degree out of proportion to their numbers, because the political ideas they believed in dominated the whole of their lives, and were by them applied, with knowledge and practicality, to every department of legislation and administration. They were, too, the single set of people who knew definitely what they wanted, and why.

Jeremy Bentham, the Master of the group, had an intensely critical mind, and an amazing power of looking at things ordinarily taken for granted as though he were seeing them for the first time. He died, at the age of eighty-four, in the year of the passing of the Reform Bill – the same year in which Goethe died. His subversive work began at the age of sixteen, and continued, with unwearying industry, throughout his long and cheerful life. To Oxford, where he graduated at fourteen, and, as he himself records, 'learned nothing', he returned at sixteen to listen to lectures by the great jurist, Blackstone, for the purpose of tearing them to pieces. He looked at the sacred British constitution and British laws, and found them stuffed with injustices and absurdities; his vast work, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, subjected laws and institutions to a test of

his own devisal – the greatest happiness of the greatest number – and found them gravely wanting. For this book, Revolutionary France, in the year of the taking of the Bastille, made him a citizen: an honour Bentham, who was a complete internationalist, warmly valued. But his major task was to get his principles adopted at home; and it is in fact to him and his disciples that legal reform in Britain is due, as also the steady spread of the democratic notions to which he was devoted. His greatest and most lasting service was, perhaps, that he instilled into every mind coming into close contact with his the ideal of the public good. In this, he believed, ardently. Yet the corner stone of his moral philosophy was the ingrained and fundamental selfishness of man. Bentham, personally amiable, full of kindness, a lover of animals, an enthusiastic pianist, who devoted his entire life to reform, thought that self-interest was the single operative motive, to which human actions must be referred. While he advocated, in season and out of season, the rule of the majority, he saw that majority as made up of individuals each one of whom was personally incapable of any motive higher than grab. Despite this dreary philosophy, he and his group attacked abuses, campaigned against monopoly, privilege and patronage, and clamoured for real equality of opportunity through education, with an energy entirely admirable and extremely effective.

This creed, which had a constantly cheerful if pungent accent in the genial Bentham, wealthy, eminently philanthropic, full of pawky humour, took on a more acrimonious tone in the mouth of his chief lieutenant, James Mill. In him, a hard-headed Scot, who had early rejected any kind of religion, since on that subject noth-

ing could be known, great force of character and of intellect were combined with a disbelief in feeling and a contempt for his fellow-men that had a positively rasping edge. His son, in his *Autobiography*, describes his outlook:

> 'He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by. This was a topic on which he did not often speak, especially, it may be supposed, in the presence of young persons; but, when he did, it was with an air of settled and profound conviction. He would sometimes say that if life were made all that it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having; but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility. . . . For passionate emotions of all sorts, and for everything that has been said or written in exaltation of them, he professed the greatest contempt.'

James Mill was the son of a village shoemaker, born in 1773, in the county of Angus, where his name was originally spelt Milne. After going to school at Montrose Academy, he went on to the University of Edinburgh, thanks to the good offices of Sir James Stuart of Fettercairn, whose children he tutored; after him, he named his eldest son. In 1802, the year of the Peace of Amiens, he came to London, and had, at first, a hard struggle to make ends meet. The publication in 1817 of his masterly *History of British India*, however, secured him that employment with the East India Company in which he remained till his death, in 1836, from a pulmonary weakness inherited, in some degree, by all his children. While still dependent for a livelihood on his mordant pen, he married, in 1805, a lovely girl called Harriet Barrow. It was not a happy marriage. She seems to have

been stupid, though kindly; his morose irritability at home made him hard to live with; the house, at Pentonville, was too full of children. John's birth on 20 May, 1806, was rapidly followed by that of eight brothers and sisters, of whom two died young. This family the father set himself, in such leisure as he had, to educate with an unparalleled thoroughness, in the way that it ought to go; that he made one of his primary objects in life. Not infrequently, they all went to stay with Bentham, who had various country abodes. When John was six, his father had an attack of illness. Believing that his days were numbered, he assigned the continuation of the child's training to Bentham, since, as he said, the thought that would pinch him most, if he were to die, would be that he left the poor boy's mind unmade.

That he assuredly did not do. In his *Autobiography*, the son has given an account of the deepest interest and the utmost singularity of the intensive training he actually received at the hands of his father. When he was but three years old, Greek was begun, and before he was eight, when Latin followed, he had read in the original, Æsop, Xenophon, Herodotus, and the early Dialogues of Plato, as well as English histories and books on government without number. James Mill, who conducted the teaching himself, enforced not only a kind but a continuity of study that is truly appalling to contemplate. Arithmetic, which John disliked, was his evening task. From the age of eight onwards, the continued study for himself of both Greek and Latin history and higher mathematics was combined with his teaching of his younger brothers and sisters. Soon, too, his own education entered a more serious phase:

'From about the age of twelve, I entered into another and more advanced stage in my instruction, in which the main object was no longer the aids and appliances of thought, but the thoughts themselves. This commenced with logic, in which I began at once with the Organon, and read it to the Analytica inclusive, but profited little by the Posterior Analytics, which belong to a branch of speculation I was not ripe for. Contemporaneously with the Organon, my father made me read the whole or parts of several of the Latin treatises on the scholastic logic; giving each day to him on our walks a minute account of what I had read, and answering his numerous and searching questions.'

This, at twelve; at twelve, too, every minute of the day was filled with some mental task, either as learner or as teacher. A vivid picture is given by Francis Place, who went to stay with Bentham at his country place, Ford Abbey, at a time when the Mill family were, as often happened, living with the philosopher.

'I cannot but admire the children here, who give no one any trouble; they have a hard time of it, learning their lessons every morning from six till nine, and saying them, and learning others, from eleven to one; and learning again in the afternoon – learning, too, with a precision unknown by others. . . . Mill is beyond comparison the most diligent fellow I ever knew or heard of; almost any other man would tire or give up teaching, but not so he; three hours every day, frequently more, are devoted to the children, and there is not a moment's relaxation. His method is by far the best I have ever witnessed, and is infinitely precise; but he is excessively severe. No fault, however trivial, escapes his notice; none goes without reprehension or punishment of some sort. Lessons have not been well said this morning by Willie and Clara; there they are now, three o'clock, plodding over their books, their dinner, which they knew went up at one,

brought down again; and John, who dines with them, has his books also, for having permitted them to pass when they could not say, and no dinner will any of them get until six o'clock. This has happened once before since I came. The fault to-day is *a mistake in one word.* Now I could not be so severe; but the learning and reasoning these children have acquired is not equalled by any in the whole world. John is truly a prodigy, a most wonderful fellow; and when his Logic, his Languages, his Mathematics, his Philosophy, shall be combined with a general knowledge of mankind and the affairs of the world, he will be a truly astonishing man; but he will probably be morose and selfish.'

Miraculously, he did not grow up either morose or selfish, or a mere reasoning machine. From regarding himself as a prodigy, he was saved by his father, and by the company, to which he was early admitted, of his father's friends; and by the candour and real modesty of his own disposition. Surveying his education, whose severities were in his view off-set by the fact that, in it, mere memory training was never aimed at but, always, 'understanding not only went along with every step of the teaching, but, if possible, preceded it'; and finding his 'recollections almost wholly of failures, hardly ever of success', he nevertheless states that he owes nearly everything to it:

'If I had been by nature extremely quick of apprehension, or had possessed a very accurate or retentive memory or were of a remarkably active and energetic character, the trial would not be conclusive; but in all these natural gifts I am rather below than above par; what I could do could assuredly be done by any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution; and if I have accomplished anything, I owe it, among other fortunate circumstances to the fact that through the early training

bestowed on me by my father, I started, I may fairly say, with an advantage of a quarter of a century over my contemporaries.'

If, trained as he was to believe solely in reason, 'never a boy', with no friends and no time to play with them, John yet escaped becoming either a prig or a bore, the reason is that there slept in him a vein of secret fire, unsuspected by his father, and unknown, for long years to come, to himself. Its first evidence was his swift response to natural beauty. A year spent in France, when he was but fourteen, with Sir Samuel Bentham, Jeremy's brother, opened up new worlds. The eldest son of the house was later to acquire fame as a botanist: from him, Mill acquired a hobby that lasted to the very end of his life; his latest expedition, very shortly before his death, was a fifteen-mile walk in search of plants. With acute delight – something near to the passion Wordsworth describes – he realised the glories of mountain scenery in the Pyrenees. He also took in a new civilisation, that of France, which he compared favourably with what he knew of English; and obtained a serviceable command over a second language, which he used with fluency and ease, although he never acquired a really good accent.

On his return, his education was resumed, on specifically Benthamite lines. At fifteen, he read Bentham for himself and, carried away with enthusiasm, determined to tread in his footsteps. In 1822, being then sixteen, he composed his first argumentative essay. Its theme is suggestive: 'It was an attack on what I regarded as the aristocratic prejudice, that the rich were, or were likely to be, superior in moral qualities to the poor.'

In the winter of this same year, he got together a small

discussion society of youths of ideas similar to his own. They met once a fortnight, read and argued. They accepted the Benthamite view of 'utility' as the one standard of values, and, enthusiasts in that belief, saw themselves future propagandists for it. This little group took the name by which the Benthamites were afterwards to be known: they called themselves the Utilitarian Society. Mill hastens to tell us that he did not invent the name, but found it in Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, where the faithful are warned not to leave the Gospel and become 'mere utilitarians'; at sixteen, he lifted it, joyously, as a banner.

At seventeen his professional career was fixed. He, like his brothers after him, entered the service of the East India Company: at first as a clerk, afterwards rising to the highest post. At India House in Leadenhall Street, he worked from ten to six for the next thirty-five years of his life: until the East India Company was abolished. It was in his room at India House that Alexander Bain found him at work, when he visited him, many years later: a vast room, thirty feet long by eighteen wide, with almost no furniture and no view but over a small brick court. There he wrote, often at a standing desk; there he walked, up and down, as his habit was, when thinking out any knotty point. Thence most of his letters were dispatched. In the course of his life he did so many other things, and was so constantly before the public as a writer, that it is easy to forget that he was, for thirty-five years, practically a civil servant. Although he did, at times, regret his exclusion from active politics, the employment, on the whole, suited him. He was alive to the drawbacks of dependence on writing for a livelihood, and says:

'I have, throughout life, found office duties an actual rest from the other mental occupations I have carried on simultaneously. They were sufficiently intellectual not to be a distasteful drudgery, without being such as to cause any strain upon the mental powers of a person used to abstract thought, or to the labour of careful literary composition.'

The bar, of which his father had at first thought for him, might have brought honours and riches; the loss of these he did not mind. But he would have liked to be able to live more in the country, which he loved. For flowers and birds, he had a passion; he made expeditions to hear the nightingale, and when in Cornwall in the company of the Fox family about 1843, assembled a charming Catalogue of Flower Odours for the gracious Caroline, who, in her *Journal*, gives a very agreeable picture of picnic walks and talks with him. To the country he always sped on Sunday, for long walks; walking, with knapsack on back, was his favourite way of spending the month's holiday in the year allowed to the servants of the India Company. Generally he went abroad: Paris he knew well: there he had many friends, later; at one time or another, he visited France, Belgium, the Rhineland, the Tyrol, Switzerland, Italy and Greece. The opportunity of longer journeys, such as those to Italy and, twice, to Greece, came later, as the result of more or less serious turns of illness. Thus, in 1848, a bad fall in Kensington Gardens, and serious trouble with his eyes, sent him abroad for several months; six years later, an illness gravely affecting his chest and leaving him dependent on the use of one lung, was followed by a sojourn in Italy, Sicily and Greece. Apart from these illnesses, his frame was robust, and his powers of sustained work enormous.

Thomas Love Peacock, who met him about the time of his entry into India House, describes him as a 'disquisitive youth', argumentative, stuffed with views and facts, and much more unfamiliar than he yet realised with the mind of the average man. He was soon contributing more or less regularly to the important reviews; another piece of work was the preparation of Bentham's *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* for the Press. The MS. was chaotic: Bentham 'had begun this Treatise three times at considerable intervals, each time in a different manner, and each time without reference to the preceding; two of the three times, he had gone over nearly the whole of the subject.' He had not only to condense three masses of manuscript into a single coherent book; he had to unwind the Master's vast parenthetical sentences, and fill in the large gaps that he had left. His task was arduous; that of editor and contributor in one; so substantial was it, indeed, that Bentham insisted, to Mill's surprise, on his name appearing with his own on the title-page. For two years, this was his evening relaxation.

The day started as strenuously as it closed. He was carrying on his Utilitarian Society, in a new form. Twice a week, between half-past eight in the morning, and ten, when their offices claimed them, a knot of youths like-minded with himself met in a room put at their disposal by Mr. Grote, the banker – father of the historian of Greece – in his house in Threadneedle Street. There they sharpened their wits by really severe disputation. They began with economics: James Mill's *Elements* being followed by Ricardo's *Principles*; from this, they went on to Logic, and from Logic to Analytical Psychology. Often, Mill would postpone his break-

fast until he got to India House, where his tea, toast and egg were brought into his room by the messenger. The keenness of these young men is striking, their method astonishingly strenuous. He describes it:

> 'Our rule was to discuss thoroughly every point raised, whether great or small, prolonging the discussion until all who took part were satisfied with the conclusion they had individually arrived at; and to follow up every topic of collateral speculation which the chapter or the conversation suggested, never leaving it until we had untied every knot which we found. We repeatedly kept up a discussion of some one point for several weeks, thinking intently on it during the intervals of our meetings, and contriving solutions for the new difficulties which had arisen out of last morning's discussion.'

Here was a mental training, indeed; even in that day of ardent argumentation, few were the young men at the universities or anywhere else who were preparing their minds by a discipline as severe as that of Mill and his associates. He says that it was through this close and realistic disputation, where nothing was taken on authority or hearsay, and where the best that each had to bring was put into the common pool, that he 'acquired, or very much perfected a mental habit' to which he attributes everything he was able to do as a thinker. This was a habit

> 'of never accepting half solutions of difficulties as complete; never abandoning a puzzle, but again and again returning to it until it was cleared up; never allowing obscure corners of a subject to remain unexplored, because they did not appear important; never thinking that I perfectly understood any part of a subject until I understood the whole.'

With these companions, he raised the one matter on which, as yet, he knew that he differed from his father: the position of women. James Mill – in this disagreeing with his master, Bentham – regarded women as inferior beings. His son, so soon as he began to think at all – and that, with him, was very soon indeed – was entirely unable to see any mental or moral sex differentiation, or any grounds for refusing equality to one-half the human race. He felt, from the first, strongly on the matter: thought it of vast importance: strove earnestly, and with considerable success, to convert his friends to his own view.

The morning talks above described were, in the main, with men whose general outlook was more or less the same as his own. But his political and social discussions were by no means confined to the ranks of the faithful. He was keen to meet those who disagreed and test his opinions in the furnace of hard debate. So, he sought out the followers of Robert Owen, and found much that was sympathetic in their standpoint: he founded, and to a large extent, ran, quite an imposing debating society, called the Speculative Society. Here young men like George Grote, Thirlwall (later Bishop of St. David's and eminent as an historian), Austin (later author of the *Principles of Jurisprudence*), Roebuck (who was to acquire some fame as a Radical M.P.), Charles Buller (whom Carlyle loved, and who as secretary to Lord Durham, was to be credited with the authorship of the famous Durham Report on Canada), carried on full-dress discussions on the leading issues of the day. Mill himself learned to speak with fluency, although, by his own account, he was never a really good speaker. Through his enterprise, again, representatives of the school of

thought most definitely opposed, on broad philosophical grounds, to the Benthamite, also came, and hard fights followed. Whereas the Benthamites believed that there was no knowledge save that given, directly, through experience, the school of which Coleridge was the leader in England held that it was through direct intuition that the mind apprehended truth, and that the ultimate nature of reality transcended experience. To James Mill, any such view was a detestable heresy; his son at this stage agreed, but he was much attracted personally by John Sterling, who, with Frederic Denison Maurice, came to the Speculative Society as champions of Coleridgeanism.

This ferment of intellectual activity was, be it noted, before he was twenty. His world, up to this time, was very much as James Mill might have made it. Without exception, these young men were passionately interested in politics; most of them dismissed poetry and the emotions with proper Benthamite scorn. If they were ignorant of an important chapter of human life and experience, they did not know it. Some of them never knew it. John was not one of these. Perhaps, indeed, he survived and even escaped from the prison his father had constructed for him, just because the formidable engines of instruction and formation turned upon him from infancy to manhood were addressed, exclusively, to his mind. For his father he felt an immense admiration and loyalty; but he could not truly love him. His feelings were starved. But they were not warped. The sealed spring was miraculously intact beneath the arid surface. Soon, it was to gush forth, and with it a man was to appear far different from the one planned by James Mill.

CHAPTER III

HIS OWN MAN

By the time he was twenty, Mill had begun to make a name for himself as a Radical writer and speaker. He had a series of weighty articles to his credit in the important reviews of the day: articles weighty in subject and treatment, and received as from a man of weight. His father's friends purred. Here, they said to one another, is a new leader for us, with shoulders shaped to the mantle, ready to take it when it falls: a champion in the cause of sound economics, guarded political reform, and the principle of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. His career seemed to lie clear and even brilliant, straight ahead of him; his feet to be well set on the path to the most worthy kind of success.

Then, there came a pause. He ceased to write. His talk lost spirit. For more than a year, no articles came from his pen, and he took only a languid part in the debates and arguments of his various societies. Although he had there many associates, he had as yet no friend on a footing of real personal intimacy. There was no one to whom he naturally talked without reserve, with whom he could share the burden that now oppressed him. Possibly nobody, at the time, realised what was happening to him, or that anything was happening. But when he sat down, more than forty years after, to write his

Autobiography, it lived vivid in his memory, and he was able to describe it.

It was an experience which reveals both the colour of his own mind and the influences that had shaped it. From the winter of 1821, he records, when, at the age of fifteen, he first read Bentham, he 'had what might truly be called an object in life: to be a reformer of the world'. Such was the dream of the boy who had never played cricket or any other game, but had, from the age of three, been tied to the wheel of intellectual discipline. When he says 'reformer', he means political reformer: the kind who, as we put it, 'gets things done'. The content of the idea was institutional, not spiritual; for the Benthamite, the world of spirit was a myth: the world of public activity – politics, debates, committees, newspapers – reality. 'My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object.' For the next five years of incessant discussion, it held. Then came the autumn of 1826. For some reason, he fell into a 'dull state of nerves', was low and rather miserable. Why, he did not know, until, suddenly, a question put itself to him, 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realised: that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?'

That a youth of twenty should put the question to himself in this form may seem strange, but the sincerity of this youth is not open to question. For him, trained as he was, the issue was indeed central. The answer to his question came with fearful certainty: 'An irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered "No". At this, my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on

which my life was constructed fell down. . . . I seemed to have nothing left to live for.'

He was, in truth, staring at a Medusa of petrifying authority. Everything he had been taught to think and to believe in hung on one lynch-pin: the possibility of achieving general human happiness through appropriate opinions and institutions. If, so the Benthamites taught, men would only realise that self-interest, the search for one's own pleasure, is, to all intents and purposes, the sole human motive, and rely on that, all could be well. In economics, it worked; no one doubted it there; install it, through a complete system of democracy, in politics, too, and the greatest happiness of the greatest number would occur, automatically. Bentham had, for his disciples and the world, drawn up a 'Table of the Springs of Action', according to which

> 'Man is a being susceptible of pleasures and pains, and governed in all his conduct partly by the different modifications of self-interest and the passions commonly classed as selfish; partly by sympathies, or occasionally antipathies, to other beings. And here Bentham's conception of human nature stopped.'*

No room here for intangible, æsthetic or spiritual motives. Self alone governs man: disguised, it may be, as sympathy or antipathy, but always there, dominant and ultimately supreme. Personal pleasure is the single operative impulse, the sole spring of action and emotion. When it dies, all is dead.

At twenty, Mill looked at this calculus, and something in him, not allowed for in the books, 'an irrepressible self-consciousness', cried 'No'. It was a cry of torment.

* Essay on Bentham.

The torment went on. The cloud, instead of passing, grew thicker, more completely over-shadowing. 'I carried it into all companies, into all occupations.' It was a load which weighed him down, constantly. Thinking made it worse. Books did not help. Talk was impossible. There was no one to talk to: his loneliness suddenly became a fact. 'I sought no comfort in speaking to others of what I felt. If I had loved anyone enough to make confiding my griefs a necessity, I should not have been in the condition I was.' His father was, of course, the last person to whom he could look for help in such a case as this. 'I saw no use in giving him the pain of thinking that his plans had failed, when the failure was probably irremediable, and at all events, beyond the power of his remedies.' So deep was the dejection into which he fell, and so entirely reasonable, given his premises, that during the winter, he frequently asked himself whether he could or was bound to go on living. 'I did not think I could possibly bear it beyond a year.' He was, in truth, passing through a crisis as painful, as significant, and as creative of what was to follow, as was, for Carlyle, the agonising period in which he cast off the faith of his father. It was a crisis of the same kind; Mill, too, was wrestling with the faith of his father: that dark pessimism which he now saw for what it was. He cast it off, at last, after passing through an inner revolution that made the first great watershed in his history: caused, as he himself said, looking back upon it, a transformation. After it, he was a different man: a man who grew on lines of his own, then determined.

The stages in his release were gradual. First, his sheer, frozen misery began to melt. Part of his wretchedness was the belief that feeling was fatally dead in him.

He could not be happy in his father's way, and there was no other. Relief came when a passage he was reading in Marmontel's *Memoires* moved him to tears. He realised that he was not a 'stock or a stone'. Again, when he heard, and drew extreme pleasure from Weber's *Oberon*, performed for the first time in London. That, however, brought a distress with it: he queried whether the limitation of the musical scale did not set rigid limits to musical enjoyment. Here, and throughout, the root of his wretchedness was connected with despair for others. Its centre was the feeling that 'The flaw in my life was a flaw in life itself'. Not his own lack of happiness and of capacity for it, so much as disbelief in happiness for others, tortured him. It was a relief to find that he could feel, but real escape from his misery and aridity of soul came only when he began to see that there was a fallacy in the Benthamite conception of happiness itself. To aim at it directly, he saw, is not the way to achieve it: nor can it ever be achieved for those whose impulses are purely self-regarding. But the impulses of men are not, in fact, as Bentham assumed, purely self-regarding. There are authentic values, emotional, spiritual, æsthetic, left out. Men are capable of sacrifice; capable of quite disinterested appreciations.

So, reading Wordsworth for the first time in the autumn of 1828, did prove medicinal, since he expresses

> 'not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. . . . I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with greatly increased interest in, the common feelings and common destiny of human beings.'

To him, Wordsworth was, in large measure, what Goethe was to Carlyle – the Redeemer. It was not, however, until, in 1831, he made what he calls 'the most valuable friendship of my life' that he ceased to be liable to emotional relapses: to periods in which the burden of the unintelligible world was well-nigh unendurable, yet had to be endured. Then and only then did he for good come out of prison, free to be himself.

To what still seemed true in the opinions in which he had been brought up, he held. There was no sudden or violent break. He did, in fact, become a reformer: to the last, he was a democrat, a radical, a utilitarian, in a new and wider sense. But the crisis in his mental history broke the bonds of his father's purely negative creed and cast from him its arid cocksureness. After it, he knew, once and for all, that there were more things in Heaven and earth, and in the mind of man, than were dreamed of in that philosophy. His new view soon began to appear in his writing, to cause anxiety in some friends, and call forth animadversions from others. But he was concerned not to give pain to his father; it was not until two years after his death, in 1836, that he published that masterly essay on Bentham (1838), which was a definite declaration of freedom, and followed it up in 1840 by another, in which he does the most perfect and generous justice to Coleridge. By 1828, however, he was, in essence, his own man. Alone, singularly lonely indeed, he was yet free; he had worked through the Centre of Indifference.

His associations inevitably began to change, in consonance with the change in his outlook. He saw less of men like Roebuck, who regarded imagination as 'mere illusion', and dangerous illusion at that: more of John

Sterling, whom he 'loved like a brother'; and of F. D. Maurice, in whom he thought, 'there was more of intellectual power wasted than in any of my contemporaries': a waste due, in his opinion to 'timidity of conscience'. He read, widely and assiduously: Goethe and Schiller (whom, in the long run he preferred): Wordsworth, Shelley, Southey, Coleridge; French literature extensively. Keenly interested, already, in the Socialism of Owen, he became still more interested in that of the Saint-Simon group. Their 'criticisms of the common doctrines of Liberalism' he found to be 'full of important truths'. They served to open his eyes to what he saw as the 'very limited and temporary value of the old political economy, which assumes private property and inheritance as indefeasible facts, and freedom of production and exchange as the *dernier mot* of social improvement'.

The Revolution of 1830 roused his enthusiasm. He sped across to Paris, to see it in action: when he returned, he wrote much on French topics for *The Examiner*, then a leading weekly. It was for it that he wrote, in 1831, a series of articles on 'The Spirit of the Age'. He describes their style as 'lumbering'. Carlyle, who read them in Craigenputtock, cried, 'Here is a new mystic'; and when he came to London for the first time, in that same year, effected an introduction to the author. His early description of Mill is interesting: he found

> 'A slender rather tall, elegant youth, with small Roman nosed face, two small, earnestly smiling eyes: modest, remarkably gifted with precision of utterance; enthusiastic yet lucid, calm; not a great yet distinctly a gifted and amiable youth. We had almost four hours of the best talk I have mingled in for long.'

Carlyle went home to Scotland, no publisher being, as yet, willing to risk *Sartor*, but they wrote regularly, and were soon on terms of warm friendship. It was, as Carlyle puts it in an early letter, a 'relationship between two Somethings'. This authentic quality, with a common passion for truth and justice, brought them together, different as they were in background and in temper. Mill puts the difference between them in a single sentence, written, later, in another connection when he says: 'Mine is a logic of the indicative mood alone; the logic of the imperative, in which the major premiss says not "is" but "ought", I do not meddle with.' He attempts to explain to Carlyle that, in the full sense in which he means it, he is not a mystic. He has 'the strongest wish to believe': he 'entirely recognises "the infinite nature of Deity" ': he knows 'the unspeakable good it would be to me to have a *faith* like yours, I mean as firm as yours, on that, to you, fundamental point', and is 'as conscious of this when life is a happiness to me as when it is, what it has been for long periods now passed by, a burthen'. But 'I know that neither you nor anyone else can be of any use to me in this. . . . There is wanting something positive in me which exists in others; whether that something be, as sceptics say, an acquired association, or as you say, a natural faculty'. Carlyle, in reply, appeals to 'the future John Mill', and adds – this in 1833 – 'The present John is no common Radical, but a most uncommon one, and daily growing more uncommon'.

From 1831 to 1834, when the Carlyles moved to London, the correspondence is steady, affectionate and free, and on both sides, of fascinating interest; altogether, one of the most enspiriting in literature. Among

the many topics they canvass is the great French Revolution. Mill's love of France, and his keen sympathy with the men of 1830, men whom he now knew personally and wrote to constantly, caused him to plan the writing of a history of that of 1789. He soon found that Carlyle was brooding over a similar project. Without saying anything of his own plans, he at once passed over to his friend his collections of papers, gathered portraits and other information for him in Paris, and while the first volume was being written, was in closest touch with him about it. There were long and frequent walks, after the Carlyles settled in Cheyne Row. By February, 1835, the MS. was complete, through what 'agony and bloody sweat' Mill knew, and given to him to read.

The incident that followed is, in literary history, one of the most poignant. On an evening in March, Mill, 'pale as Hector's ghost', appeared to the Carlyles, sitting under the lamp in the drawing-room at Cheyne Row. At first he could hardly speak; at last he conveyed to his friend that, by a hideous and inexplicable accident the precious MS. had been removed with a pile of waste paper by some too energetic housemaid, and consumed by fire.

Atrocious for Carlyle, most people will feel that, at the moment of realisation and confession, the disaster was, for Mill, even more appalling. Had one to be one or the other in such a case, one had rather be the sufferer than the innocent executioner. There at once passed between them letters that do infinite honour to both. First, Carlyle sat down, early next morning, to say:

Chelsea.

Saturday, 7th March, 1835.

My Dear Mill,

How are you? You left me last night with a look which I shall not soon forget. Is there anything that I could do or suffer or say to alleviate you? For I feel that your sorrow must be sharper far than mine; yours bound to be a *passive* one. How true is this of Richter: '*All* Evil is like a nightmare; the instant you begin to *stir* under it, it is *gone*.'

I have ordered a *Biographie Universelle*, this morning; and a better sort of paper. Thus, far from giving up the game, you see, I am risking another £10 on it. Courage, my Friend!

That I can never write *that* volume again is indubitable: singularly enough, the whole earth could not get it back; but only a better or a worse one. There is the strangest dimness over it. A figure thrown into the melting pot; but the metal (all that was golden, or gold-like of that, – and *copper*, can be gathered) is there: the model also *is*, in my head. O my Friend, how easily might the bursting of some puny ligament or filament have abolished all light *there* too!

That I *can* write a book on the French Revolution is (God be thanked for it) as clear to me as ever; also that if life be given me so long, I will. To it again, therefore! *Andar con Dios!*

I think you once said you could borrow for me a *Campan*? Have you any more of *Lacretelle's* things; his 18*ieme siecle*? (that is of almost no moment). The first Vol. of *Genlis's Mem.*? etc. But I find *Campan*, (if I get the *Biographie*) is the only one I shall really want much. Had I been a *trained* Compiler, I should not have wanted that. To make some search for it, I know, will be a kind of solace to you.

Thanks to Mrs. Taylor for her kind sympathies. May God guide, and bless you both! That is my true prayer.

Ever your affectionate Friend,

T. Carlyle.

While Carlyle was writing thus, Mill, at India House, was at his desk saying:

India House, March 7th.

My Dear Carlyle,

I will endeavour, as you advise, to think as little as I can of this misfortune, though I shall not be able to cease thinking of it until it is ascertained how far the loss is capable of being repaired, or rather reduced to a loss of time and labour only. There are hardly any means I would not joyfully take, if any existed, by which I could myself be instrumental to remedying the mischief my carelessness has caused. That, however, depends not upon me. But here is one part of the evil – though, I fear, the least part – which I could repair: the loss to yourself of time and labour, that is, of income. And I beg of you, with an earnestness with which perhaps I may never again have to ask anything so long as I live, that you will permit me to do this, little as it is, towards remedying the consequences of my fault and lightening my self-reproach. It is what you would permit as a matter of course if I were a stranger to you; it is what is even legally due to you; and to have brought an evil upon a friend instead of a stranger is already a sufficient aggravation of one's regret, without the addition to it of not being allowed to make even the poor amends one would make to a stranger.

If I could convince you what a relief this would be to me, and what an act of friendship, to say nothing of justice, it would be on your part, I am sure you would not hesitate.

Yours affectionately,
J. S. Mill.

Carlyle accepted, though he insisted that the 'amends' should be one and not, as Mill urged, two hundred pounds. No part of this tragic transaction left any shadow on their affection. If, in the two published volumes of Mill's Letters, this to Carlyle about the

MS. appears as the last, that it was by no means the last is quite clear from the collection of Carlyle's Letters issued in 1923 by Dr. Alexander Carlyle; there, one realises that, although they were both living in London, and met constantly for walks and talks, they also wrote to one another regularly, up to 1850. The old affection, if not the old intimacy, lasted to the end.

If the intimacy was to some extent sundered, the reason lies in the great transforming event of Mill's personal life: his meeting with and deep affection for Harriet Taylor.

About this, more nonsense has been written, to the discredit of those who have written it, than about any other aspect of his life. 'Strange' and 'singular' are the kindest words employed, even by his biographer, W. L. Courtney, who would seem to have taken his notions from the ill-natured Mrs. Grote. The facts are simple. In 1831, when he was twenty-six and she twenty-five, he met, at her own dinner table, Mrs. Taylor: a woman of more than common intelligence and beauty who had, at eighteen, to escape from a most unhappy home, married a worthy manufacturer, more than twenty years older than herself. The Taylors moved in the same society as did Mill, the Carlyles, the Austins, the Grotes. At the dinner party in question, Roebuck, Harriet Martineau and W. J. Fox were also present. There was nothing against her as a friend for Mill, except the fact that she was already married. No one has ventured to say, although many have hinted, that, when their friendship ripened into love, that fact was forgotten.

The first link between them was the manner in which her vivid intelligence lit up his deep-seated belief in

the equality of the sexes. They talked of this, and became friends. Before long, they knew that their feeling was more than mere friendship. In Mill's case, the revelation with all its loveliness, must have been a shattering one. His starved childhood and unnaturally repressed youth now exacted their price. He knew feeling, with the force of a heart at once deeply passionate and profoundly ignorant; he saw Heaven opening, and knew that he must hold the gate shut against himself. Had he lived in the 1930's instead of in the 1830's, the course of his life might have been vastly different; as it was, he and Harriet both believed deeply in the conventional moral sanctions. They could not give up a mental relationship that meant life to both: but they could, and did, respect her earlier tie. Frankly, she told her husband what had happened to her heart. There was no formal separation; she recognised a duty to her children, and admired and respected Mr. Taylor, as did Mill; but as man and wife the Taylors ceased to live together. She was not strong and was much in the country: at times she went abroad, and at times, Mill accompanied her, with her daughter, Helen. There was nothing underhand, nothing furtive; their friendship was no secret; but there must have been a great deal of suffering for both in the long twenty years in which they were friends merely: a suffering made more acute by the wounding and uncomprehending comments of those on whose understanding they might have counted. In Mill's case, these comments led to a withdrawal, more and more complete, from society and even from his family circle.

Of Harriet Taylor, beyond what he tells us, we know little: and the drawing of living portraits was never one of his gifts. Carlyle gives a few flashing glimpses, in his

Reminiscences: a 'very will o' the wispish iridescence of a creature', 'pale and passionate and sad-looking, a living-romance heroine of the royallest volition and questionable destiny'; but he on this matter hardly saw with his own eyes. Significant is his remark that 'My Jane was, by her, at first considered to be a rustic spirit fit for tutoring and twirling about when the humour took her; but got taught better (to her lasting memory) before long.' Seeing through Jane's eyes, to him, as he says in a letter to John Sterling, as early as 1836, the thing was a puzzle:

> 'I have not seen any riddle of human life which I could so ill form a theory of. They are innocent, says Charity; they are guilty says Scandal: then, why in the name of wonder are they dying broken-hearted? One thing only is painfully clear to me, that poor Mill is in a bad way. Alas, tho' he speaks not, perhaps his tragedy is more tragical than that of any of us: this very item that he does not speak, that he never could speak, but was to sit imprisoned as in thick ribbed ice, voiceless, uncommunicating, is it not the most tragical circumstance of all?'

If Mill did not 'communicate', the friends who did not wait before making their comments and whispering their suspicions, had themselves to thank for that. From their conduct, as from the inherent strain of the relationship while Mr. Taylor lived, he did suffer; but in none of his writings, including his correspondence, does one word of bitterness or even of criticism of any friend escape him, ever. Not from him could the reader gather that there ever had been any breath of scandal: that anyone had been unkind or vulgarly curious. Nor did his isolation from society affect his work in any way. In that sense Carlyle's suggestion that he was 'in a bad way'

is absurd. In 1843 he published his *System of Logic*, which established him, definitely, as one of the most important writers in Europe, and confirmed the impression of power and liberality of mind made by his articles on Bentham and Coleridge. The next year saw the appearance of *Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*; in 1848, the *Principles of Political Economy* followed.

In that year, 1848, Mr. Taylor died. In 1851, Mill and Harriet were married. They had waited twenty years; they now had but seven of happiness together, but they were years of happiness, despite the fact that her health was fragile. For that reason, they spent all the time they could in the south of France, near Avignon, in a small vine-clad white house, with an oblong garden full of mulberry and sycamore trees. There, when his time at India House came to an end, they planned to live. But it was not to be. In 1858, she died. For him, the light of life went out. Yet, because she 'would have wished it' he went on with his work; there were causes for which they had cared and worked together which he must still serve. Her daughter, Helen Taylor, who had lived with them, continued to be his companion and secretary. Brandes, to whom he talked freely of his wife, felt no doubt that she had in truth been 'the greatest boon of his life'. Not necessarily, of course, the truly marvellous intellect he revered, but a companion who fully shared his thoughts and called out the deep affection of his nature; one who 'strengthened his courage and confirmed in his mind a certain scepticism that led him to keep open amid the ice of doctrine one spot that would never freeze.'

Why the fact that he adored her has caused against

his wife so harsh an animus, even in the minds of those who never knew her, it is hard to understand. That he did adore her: that they recognised one another, at sight: that their affection endured through twenty years of the most trying circumstances: that, when they were at last free to be together, they were capable of happiness, and yet never sank into an enclosed selfishness – these are the certainties amid the maze of needless and spiteful conjecture with which critics have attempted to obscure their simplicity.

For the contemporary detractor, there is the excuse of anger against Mill on a totally different count. The change in his opinions caused many of his friends a disgust which they were at no pains to conceal. His article on Bentham was stigmatised as an act of apostasy; he was attacked as a renegade. Yet John Sterling put a truer view when he said that

> 'He has made the sacrifice of being the undoubted leader of a powerful party for the higher glory of being a private in the army of Truth, ready to storm any of the strong places of Falsehood, even if defended by his late adherents.'

This his late adherents could not see. They could not forgive him. But this excuse is really quite inadequate to cover their whisperings about his personal life. They knew him; they ought to have known that, while he had his faults and his limitations, of any form of baseness or furtiveness he was entirely incapable. What they could not forgive was, in truth, that the fire that had touched his lips was, indeed, fire from heaven. To-day, one can only feel pity for their minds, and reverence for his.

The formal outline of his life can be completed in a few sentences.

He married in 1851. By 1856, he was, as his father had been before him, head of the staff at India House: what was known as Head Examiner. As such, he drafted, in 1857, the Company's formal protest against the transference of Indian affairs to the Crown – a document described by Earl Grey, at the time, as the ablest State paper he had ever read. Lord Stanley invited him to serve on the new India Council, but he refused: his wife was by now dangerously ill, and his release from office duties enabled him to be with her constantly at Avignon until her death. There, she is buried; the inscription on her tomb records his intense devotion and unequalled admiration; there, when he died, fifteen years later, he was laid by her side.

In 1865, he was elected M.P. for Westminster, and served as such until in November, 1868, he was defeated by Mr. W. H. Smith. Avignon was, henceforth, his winter home and headquarters; but he was much in London, at Blackheath, mainly in order to give his active support to women's suffrage. In 1867 he was Rector of St. Andrew's University. The last public function he attended was the funeral, in 1871, of George Grote, the historian of Greece, in Westminster Abbey; as he walked away, he said to a friend, 'In no very long time, I shall be laid in the ground with a very different ceremonial from that.' In the last three years of life, he worked mainly on his *Autobiography*, his *Three Essays on Religion*, and on his chapters on *Socialism*, as also on the Land question. Very shortly before his death, he paid a visit to Morley and his wife in Surrey. He and Morley went for a long walk; he collected many plants, and

talked vigorously on subjects ranging from George Sand, 'whose prose stirs you like music' and Wordsworth 'who is keeping alive and nourishing those qualities the world will need more and more', to the Irish University question. Then, he returned to Avignon; there, on the night of 3 May, 1873, a fortnight before his sixty-seventh birthday, he died. When he was told the end was at hand, he replied, simply, 'My work is done.'

CHAPTER IV

HOPES AND FEARS FOR DEMOCRACY

MILL's first book, the *System of Logic*, was hailed, on its appearance in 1843, with eager praise even by those who had most sharply criticised his earlier lapses from sound doctrine. It passed rapidly through a series of editions, although he had, at first, trouble in finding a publisher for it; became a textbook on its subject, which he defined as the science of proof or evidence; and although now to some extent superseded, remains a work the student may not neglect. After this, he did not return to any philosophical topic until 1865, when both his *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* and his study of *Auguste Comte and Positivism* appeared. Yet, in a very real sense, philosophical considerations govern all his work. No writer ever aimed more consistently at presenting a connected body of thinking. They are, however, in the background; the foreground is political, or, to use a word that was only then coming into currency, sociological. What perpetually concerned him was how men live, and how they might live, here on earth. 'Few persons,' he wrote in a letter of 1863, 'look forward to the future of humanity with more brilliant hopes than I do. I see, however, many perils ahead'. To realise the hopes and avoid the perils was his continual preoccupation.

Before he finished his *Logic*, he had begun a corres-

pondence with Comte that was maintained pretty regularly for the next five years. Mill hailed Comte's work with sincere enthusiasm. Moreover, at a time when he, never a rich man, was suffering severe financial loss through American repudiation, he was most generous in pecuniary assistance to him, though never generous enough to satisfy Comte. Disappointed, then, in his personal character, he was also distressed to find him reactionary on the question of women. In the Social Philosophy, too, he began to see a flaw: without a science of character there was a dropped link in sociology; was such a science possible of construction? Alexander Bain states that it was Mill's own failure to work out satisfactorily what he called 'Ethology', that turned his mind to the notion of writing a treatise on political economy, with a thoroughly social tinge. On this, so he records in his *Autobiography*, he set to work in the autumn of 1845. For six months the work was laid aside while he wrote a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* urging the formation of peasant properties in Ireland, where the Famine was raging; but it was finished in 1847 and ready for the press before the end of that year. He called it *The Principles of Political Economy, with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*; it appeared in 1848, and immediately made a sensation.

Written thus swiftly and continuously, the book is alive; although there are sections in it that are out of date, and others that are unduly spun out, it remains interesting, as well as a landmark in economic history. What, in his own view, he tried to do for economics was to set it in a new environment – to relate it, in effect, to the human beings who are at once the subjects and the

objects of economic thinking. Although, in the first book, on Production, he states the law of diminishing returns in terms of practically inescapable authority, and declares that the conditions of the production of wealth generally 'partake of the nature of physical truths, about which there is nothing optional or arbitrary', he does so largely in order to go on, in his second book, to lay it down with emphasis that the Distribution of wealth is in a wholly different category.

> 'This is a matter of human institution solely. The things once there, mankind, individually and collectively, can do with them as they like. They can place them at the disposal of whomsoever they please, and on whatever terms. Further, in the social state, in every state except total solitude, any disposal whatever of them can only take place by the consent of society, or rather of those who dispose of its active force. . . . The distribution of wealth . . . depends on the laws and customs of society. The rules by which it is determined are what the opinions and feelings of the ruling portion of the community make them, and are very different in different ages and countries; and might be more different still if mankind so chose.'

He wrote before Darwin, but one of the main points on which he severed himself from his father and the Philosophic Radicals generally was his insistence on historical continuity and on the immense influence of circumstances over men's ways of thinking and acting. 'Revolutions,' he wrote in his great essay on Coleridge, 'are sudden to the unthinking only'; they burst upon those whose minds are blinded to fact by the force of prejudice and habit. So, here, he points out that private property in the instruments of production did not originate in 'utility', but in force, and is maintained, not

because it is an effective stimulus, but out of interest and habit. The argument from the stimulus of ownership and profit leaves out of account

> 'how small a part of all the labour performed in England, from the lowest paid up to the highest, is done by persons working for their own benefit. From the Irish reaper, or hodman, up to the Chief Justice or Minister of State, nearly all the work of society is remunerated by day wages or fixed salaries. A factory operative has less personal interest in his work than a member of a Communist association, since he is not, like him, working for a partnership of which he is himself a member. . . . I am not undervaluing the strength of the incitement given to labour when the whole or large share of the benefit of extra exertion belongs to the labourer. But under the present system of industry this incitement, in the great majority of cases, does not exist.'

People are hypnotised by words, which they take for things; he insists on their looking at things. Over the main range of employment, the 'incitement' of profit, which is the incitement on which Capitalism relies, does not, cannot, incite. Over the major range of human existence, freedom, which the writers of his day were extolling as the great benefit conferred by a system of *laissez faire*, is illusory: confined to a handful of persons. Poverty, on the other hand, is a fact of appalling generality. His descriptions of it have neither the vivid colour not the searing edge of Carlyle's; but their quiet authority is memorable.

Distribution, he demonstrates, can within certain limiting conditions, which he lays down, be varied to any extent which society – or 'those who dispose of the active force' in it – decide to be desirable. The first of these limiting conditions is the more important, both in

the place it always occupied in his thinking, and because on it, he never changed his mind. This is the relation between population and production, as governed by the law of diminishing returns. The sense of this runs like a refrain through his writing, to the end. In the *Political Economy* he lays it down that

> 'All natural agents, which are limited in quantity, are not only limited in their ultimate productive power but, long before that power is stretched to the utmost, they yield to any additional demands on progressively harder terms. The law may, however, be suspended, or temporarily controlled, by whatever adds to the general power of mankind over nature; and especially by the extension of their knowledge or consequent command of the properties and powers of natural objects.'

Our contemporary scientific discoveries would fall under the last clause; what he had more in mind was the control of man over himself, over his own lower instincts. There, salvation was in his own hands. There were things Mill thought the State could and should do – the limitation of inheritance was one of them; restriction of monopoly control over land was another; but he remained an Individualist to the end on one to him vital point: he thought that it was through individual action, in the main, that the control over population, on which everything else depended, could be accomplished. Thus, in a letter written in 1847, he says:

> 'What does seem to me essential is that society at large should not be over-worked, nor over-anxious about the means of subsistence, for which we must look to the grand source of improvement, repression of population, combined with laws of inheritance which shall favour the diffusion of property instead of its accumulation in masses.'

Although he lived through a period of high productivity, a period when Malthusianism fell out of credit and persons like Bradlaugh were prosecuted for preaching it, Mill remained, to the end, convinced that prudential restraint was essential. If there is control over population then, and only then, can the 'niggardliness of nature' be disregarded, and humanity's 'bright prospects' realised. Democracy was to help to this; as the workers were better off, economically, and better educated, above all in citizenship, they would, he held, limit their families.

The second limitation he lays down in the *Political Economy*, is of course, the famous doctrine of the Wages Fund. Although he does state, quite definitely, that competition is actually by no means so absolute as economists, in order to give their subject a scientific precision, tend to make out: that it has to be qualified by the recognition of custom as operative, within its own field, as well as by the narrow scope of the effective working of the profit-making incentive: although he does thus guard himself, and says that 'the ascription to competition of an unlimited sway is, as a matter of fact, a great misconception of the actual course of human affairs', he is open to the charge he himself makes against economists: does himself talk in the main as though competition had unlimited sway. Quite specifically, he does so, when he comes to wages. There is a fund out of which they are paid, and that fund is a limited amount.

Here, however, he did not stay. Between 1848 and 1869, his *Political Economy* was used as a stick to beat trade unionists and others when they sought to raise wages. What is great in him, however, is his readiness to

face and take in new facts, however upsetting to his own theories. Few are the persons of acknowledged eminence who can admit that they have been wrong. Mill was such a person. In 1869, he wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* for May an article in which, reviewing *The Claims of Labour*, by Thornton, he says that Thornton is right in there attacking the Wages Fund theory; and that he himself had been wrong in endorsing it. He dots the i's and crosses the t's: he stated it in his *Political Economy* in a form in which it is false, and the deductions drawn from it are false.

He refers to 'a series of deductions, generally received as incontrovertible. They are found, I presume, in every treatise on systematic political economy, my own certainly included. I must plead guilty to having, with the world in general, accepted the theory without the limitations and qualifications necessary to make it admissible.' The theory was that, at any given moment, there is a 'pre-determined amount' of wealth 'unconditionally devoted to the payment of wages'.

> 'More than that amount it is assumed that the wages-receiving class cannot possibly divide among them; that amount, and no less, they cannot but obtain. So that, the sum to be divided being fixed, the wages of each depend solely on the divisor, the number of participants. . . . But is there such a thing as a wages-fund, in the sense here implied? Exists there any fixed amount, which, and neither more nor less than which, is destined to be expended in wages?
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> 'Of course, there is an impassable limit to the amount which can be so expended; it cannot exceed the aggregate means of the employing classes. It cannot come up to those means; for the employers have also to maintain themselves and their families. But, short of that limit, it is not, in any sense of the word, a fixed amount.'

He sees quite clearly how vital an alteration is here involved, and at once proceeds to draw the consequences:

> 'The doctrine hitherto taught by all or most economists (including myself) which denied it to be possible that trade combinations can raise wages, or which limited their operation to the somewhat earlier attainment of a rise which the competition of the market would have produced without them – this doctrine is deprived of scientific foundation, and must be thrown aside.'

In fact, trade unions can assist the workers collectively 'to obtain both a larger share and a larger positive amount of the produce of labour'. There is disproved the supposed 'natural law', till then accepted, 'by which the price of labour is strictly determined in a manner inalterable by the effort of either party to the transaction.'

The effect of this recantation was prodigious; the last rampart of the old political economy seemed to have gone down. Moreover, Mill's article appeared at a moment of vital importance in the history of trade Unionism. A Royal Commission, born partly of the once famous Sheffield outrages of 1865, partly of a legal judgment which seemed, in effect, to repeal the Combination laws, was about to report; feeling on both sides ran very high. Mill's quiet but emphatic declaration that trade unions, in seeking to raise wages, were *not* running counter to the sacred laws of political economy, came at a critical juncture, and had a far-reaching influence on opinion.

Even in its original 1848 form, the *Political Economy* was an event. Its entire tone and reference was revolutionary. Here, economics is presented not as some-

thing abstract and remote but as something that touches the life of men at countless points. It is presented as part of the study of man's effort to live, as best he may, in a world with his fellows. Its spirit is that of man, master of his own destiny, encompassed with dangers and the possibility of false choices, but free to choose, able to make for himself the environment he desires. For each reader the book sets up long trains of reflection, and perhaps criticism, on the world he knows. It stimulates him to be the kind of free creature that Mill admired. Its strong positivism reflects the quality in him that speaks so definitely in his *Liberty*; the quality Carlyle at once recognised when, dividing men into what he called 'yes' men and 'no' men, he declared him to belong to the former category. It was a quality of Mill's own: no part of his inheritance.

From his father he took a grim and quiet Tennysonian view of Nature, and a highly critical outlook on men, as he saw them, here and now. He was unable to believe in an omnipotent beneficient God. He was constantly haunted by the dread lest the improvidence of man might co-operate with the 'niggardliness of nature' to destroy civilisation. Yet from his father's pessimism he revolted, so soon as he saw it for what it was. What saved him, kept him alive and responsive to his latest day, was the strong feeling that lay hidden in him, and the vein of poetry that was part and parcel of that capacity for feeling. He believed that men in general had an awareness of values different from those of capitalistic society lying latent in them: ready to be called out, if given a chance. He says of himself, 'I am not in the least a poet, in any sense, but I can do homage to poetry.' His view of his own function, in relation to it,

was modest: he was, he thought, fitted to be 'Logician-in-Ordinary' to the poet. So he told Carlyle, whom he regarded as one. Carlyle, it is true, stated that 'If John Mill were to get up to Heaven, he would hardly be content till he had made out how it all was.' That, too, was part of his make-up; to believe, he must understand; his emotion must go with, and not against, his thinking. When thinking glowed to action-point, however, it was warmed by passion; at bottom, he was a believer, not a doubter.

So, when in his *Political Economy*, he forecasts a 'stationary state' of society, he does not regret it; on the contrary, he hails it with enthusiasm. He repudiates, roundly, the 'ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on'. He denies that the 'trampling, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life' are 'anything but disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress'. The best state of society, he declares, is not this. Its marks are that 'while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason for being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward'. It is, he says, only in backward countries that a mere increase in production 'is still an important object. In those more advanced, *what is economically needed is better distribution.*' Through the 'prudence and frugality of individuals' (i.e., by voluntary restriction of families) and a 'system of legislation favouring equality of fortunes' (by a strict limitation of inheritance and of the right to private property in land) a world far better and far happier than this could be realised. The chapter closes with a justly famous passage:

'It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the Art of living, and much more likelihood of its being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on. Even the industrial arts might be as earnestly and successfully cultivated, with this sole difference, that instead of serving no purpose but the increase of wealth, industrial improvements would produce their legitimate effect, that of abridging labour. Hitherto, it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment, and an increased number of manufacturers and others to make fortunes. They have increased the comforts of the middle classes. But they have not yet begun to make those great changes in human destiny which it is in their nature and their futurity to accomplish. Only when, in addition to just institutions, the increase of mankind shall be under the deliberate guidance of judicious foresight, can the conquests made from the powers of nature by the intellect and energy of scientific discoverers become the common property of the species and the means of improving and elevating the universal lot.'

The view he here sets out, he held steadily and consistently throughout his life. The passage quoted appears in the original edition of the *Political Economy*, and was never altered. More than ten years later, in his *Utilitarianism*, the same fundamental faith in human destiny is reaffirmed and underlined:

'No one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removeable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within

narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this destestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those with whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with wordly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence or of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect institutions. All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are, in great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow – though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made – yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however, small and inconspicuous, in the endeavour, will draw a nobler enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without.'

It is almost with a sense of tragic irony that one reads these words in the nineteen-thirties. Nearly three-quarters of a century have passed since they were written. The formal conditions have been realised. The powers of production are greater, far, than he ever guessed; the law of diminishing returns appears to be suspended (if the 'tendency of profits to a minimum' has arrived, to neutralise it). But poverty remains. It has taken on new and soul-destroying forms, in worldwide

unemployment. Preventable suffering exists on every hand.

What has happened? Mill was not wrong in seeing the conquests he forecast as possible. Was he wrong in thinking that a democratic society could achieve them?

That he did so think; that his faith was in democracy, and that it was well-nigh absolute, is of course, the clearest note in all his writing. On that point, he extended and expanded, but never abandoned the doctrines in which he grew up. He interpreted democracy in a way his father and Bentham never dreamed of. He read, and was deeply impressed by, de Tocqueville; and would have agreed, with the interpretation of his view given by H. J. Laski that 'a democratic society is one in which the incidence of policy is not biased in the direction of any particular group in the community – in which, therefore, the interest of any individual in the operation of the State is approximately equal to that of any other'. He believed that history shows a perpetual struggle for the realisation of this kind of equality. This is, indeed, the substance of his argument in his *Liberty* (1859); his *Representative Government* (1861); and his *Subjection of Women* (1869).

The historical point he puts most clearly in the last. He bases his plea for the emancipation of women in part on the ground that 'the peculiar character of the modern world', to which their position was, when he wrote, the only exception, is that

> 'Human beings are no longer born to their place in life, and chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to, but are free to employ their faculties and such favourable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable. . . . It is felt to be an

> over-stepping of the bounds of authority to fix beforehand, on some general presumption, that certain persons are not fit to do certain things.'

A democratic society for him connoted the fullest and most unfettered freedom of self-development, open to all. Against dependence, paternalism, privilege and power, in all their disguises, he waged incessant war. He rejoiced that

> 'the poor have now come out of leading strings, and cannot any longer be governed or treated like children.'

He rejoiced in the anticipation that 'they will become even less willing than at present to be governed and directed into the way that they should go by the mere authority and prestige of their superiors. If they have not now, still less will they have hereafter any deferential awe or religious principle of obedience holding them in mental subjection to the class above them.' He despised docile acceptance on the part of anyone. He was not afraid of passion; on the contrary. 'I want to excite your passions', he told an audience to which he was speaking on the Irish Land Laws. He was certain that 'improvement in human affairs is wholly the work of the uncontented characters'. He got into trouble once for being reported as saying that all Conservatives were stupid; what he did say, as he pointed out, was that stupid people tend to be Conservative. He preferred men and women to be active and positive, even aggressive; above all, mentally active. One of the most stirring passages in his stirring *Liberty* is his attack on the 'narrow theory of life' of Calvin, and on the 'pinch-beck and hide-bound type of character

which it patronises'. He attacked it because it was limited and limiting. His own conception of a worthwhile society was one in which opinions would be entirely free: free, above all, to contend against each other. In an inclination to accept dictatorship, he would have seen nothing but poverty of spirit, inertia of mind, and a contemptible weakness of will and desire. He adored variety:

> 'It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake of the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to.'

That self government is better than 'good' government imposed by authority, he was sure. He further held that a democratic society could only be realised through the fullest extension to all citizens of real political power: such power being, in its nature, educational. When he was told that people were not 'ready': that working men were ignorant and liable to be led away by agitators, that women thought only in personal terms, were even more ignorant and liable to be led astray – his reply was that they would learn and could learn only by experience and practice.

Believer as he was in straight education, he also held that 'the main branch of the education of human beings is their habitual employment, which must be either

their individual vocation, or some matter of general concern in which they are called to take a part'.

> 'Whatever acts upon the minds of the labouring classes is properly their education. But their minds, like those of other people, are acted upon by the whole of their social circumstances. . . . Society educates the poor, for good or ill, by its conduct to them, even more than by direct teaching.'

From this point of view, he is a warm and consistent advocate of trade unionism and of Co-operation; the earliest really appreciative account of the Rochdale Pioneers occurs in his *Political Economy*. In the directly educational effect of the exercise of citizen functions, he believes, even more wholeheartedly. Constantly deploring the extent to which 'the private money-getting occupation of nearly everyone tends to make men timid and selfish'; fully realising that the 'spirit of a commercial people will be essentially mean and slavish', unless public interest is definitely cultivated, he believes that it can and will grow, when the citizen, given a responsible share in the business of government, local and national, is taken out of his narrow circle of personal comfort and personal ambition, and made to 'feel that beside the interests which separate him from his fellow citizens, he has interests which connect him with them; and that not only the common weal is his weal, but that it depends on his exertions.'

In this faith, he never wavered. What would he feel, if he could look at the world to-day? His 'bright hopes' were accompanied by a sense of 'grave perils'. Had he those perils in mind when, in the passage quoted above (written in 1845) he says that the mind is acted upon by

'the whole of its social circumstances'? Whether or no, we can see how, and in part why, the course of events has falsified his hopes.

In advocating the fullest political democracy, he was assisting to forge one blade only of the scissors. Without economic freedom, political freedom cannot cut the bonds.

Even that statement does not carry all the way. Why has political freedom not emancipated the majority? How has it been possible for universal suffrage to leave power in the hands of the 'upper and middling orders' of whom Macaulay spoke? The answer must be not only that the minds of these orders have never accepted democracy, in the sense in which de Tocqueville and Mill meant it, as connoting genuine equality: that they have never seen the needs and claims of the poor for education, opportunity, comfort, culture, freedom of choice as really on the same footing as their own, but have preferred economic power and privilege for themselves, at the price of the practical enslavement of their fellows. That is their part of the reply. The other part is that their system of ideas and of values has, largely, been accepted by the poor themselves. Nor have the intellectual middle classes known how to resist them, or to act in terms of their claim, as true guardians of cultural values; they have not resisted the pull of luxury and show towards the 'upper' grade, nor held up to the worker any ideal of life higher than that of being better off. So, while there has been a stout resistance to real change, at the top, the individual standards of the top have, fatally, percolated through. Personal responsibility for personal opinion: the athletic gospel of hard thinking and high endeavour;

the constant struggle to realise a Periclean fullness and variety of citizen culture in a world 'where, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer' – these ideals of Mill, the individualist, were also part and parcel of Mill, the democrat. Too rarely have they animated either governors or governed, since.

Disappointment of his bright hopes for democracy, were he alive to-day, would, for him, be no reason for despair of a principle of social organisation whose foundations require, as he would to-day see, to be laid in economic equality. Those who believe in the spirit of a democratic society can still find a tonic for contemporary faintheartedness in his *Representative Government*, with its thrilling 'One person with a belief is a social power equal to ninety-nine who have only interests', or his *Liberty*, with its clarion call to mental energy.

CHAPTER V

SOCIALISM?

'No longer enslaved or made dependent by force of law, the great majority are so by force of poverty; they are still chained to a place, to an occupation, and to conformity with the will of an employer, and debarred, by the accidents of birth, both from the enjoyments and the mental and moral advantages which others inherit without exertion and independently of desert. That this is an evil equal to almost any of those against which mankind have hitherto struggled, the poor are not wrong in believing. . . .

'The working-classes are entitled to claim that the whole field of social institutions should be re-examined, and every question considered as if it now arose for the first time.'

Of this evil, he became more and more aware, as he grew older. Habit never filmed his eyes. He never thought, as writers are apt to do, that questions had been settled, because he had written about them. He did not, ever, withdraw into a world of people of his own sort, and lose awareness of the lot of the multitude: or cease to care about that lot. The passage above comes from the work on which he was engaged at the time of his death: from those three *Chapters on Socialism* which were printed, posthumously, by the authority of his adopted daughter and secretary, Helen Taylor, in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1879.

The point on which he lays his finger, here, is for him, determinant. He anticipated later Socialist thinking in seeing the power of the few, and the want of freedom of the many, as an evil even more crying than their poverty, since it meant not only present suffering but future waste. It was inevitable that he should see it so. The core of his thinking is his sense of the supreme value of the individual, as individual. Freedom of conscience, freedom for the expression of difference, even to the point of eccentricity, freedom of action and opinion, freedom to make, if need be, personal sacrifice – on these things his great *Liberty* is a Bible. Not only did he rely on the individual to take the one, to him indispensable action – the control over his own reproduction; he saw him as the carrier of the values for and through which civilisation exists. On his integrity, courage and power of action everything depends. The man of mind 'must follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead'.

The sentence that follows this is significant:

> 'Not that it is solely, or even mainly, to form great thinkers that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, it is as much and even more indispensable *to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of*. There have been, and may be again, great individual thinkers in a general atmosphere of mental slavery. But there never has been, nor ever will be, in that atmosphere, an intellectually active people.'

Here, his innate and burning sense of justice deepens the channel made for his mind by his early Utilitarian teaching. The best legacy of the Benthamites is their emphasis on the need to base the good of the community in *general* happiness; when the notion of happiness, for

them so empty, is filled, as it was for him, by the ideal of general intellectual activity: of the possibility, open to every man and woman, to become the best that it is in him or her to be – then, the contrast between what should be and what is has a burning edge.

He felt this from the start. It is the source of his early-expressed sympathy with the Socialists, and of his agreement with much in their criticism. He hated the lust of power even more than he hated the lust of money: saw it as ruinous to those who exercise it, as to those over whom it is exercised. Of both rich and poor he at times said harsh things; he saw both as victims, and, as such, incompletely human. Nor did he idealise the dominant middle classes. On the contrary, the extension of the suffrage on an universal basis was desirable, *inter alia*, 'to keep the middle classes in that salutary awe without which, no doubt, those classes would be just like any other oligarchy'. His mind reached out to a state of society in which the artificial barriers of class would disappear. Thus, he says in his *Political Economy*:

> 'When I speak, either in this place or elsewhere, of the "labouring classes", or of labourers as a "class", I use these phrases in compliance with custom, and as descriptive of an existing, but by no means a necessary or permanent, state of social relations. I do not recognise as either just or salutary a state of society in which there is any "class" which is not labouring; any human beings exempt from bearing their share of the necessary labours of human life, except those unable to labour or who have fairly earned rest by previous toil. So long however as the great social evil exists of a non-labouring class, labourers also constitute a class, and may be spoken of, though only provisionally, in that character.'

Nothing annoyed him more than the view, which he

met constantly in an age when philanthropy was beginning to be fashionable, that the poor existed to provide virtuous opportunities for the rich. He desired – and this point is made as early as his first paper on The Claims of Labour, in the *Edinburgh* for 1845, to 'raise the labourer from a receiver of hire – a mere bought instrument in the work of production having no residuary interest in the work itself – to the position of being, in some sense, a partner in it'.

Believing, as he put it in a letter dated 1859, that 'Moral feeling is a natural outgrowth from the social nature of man', he saw its action repressed and distorted by preventable facts of social and economic organisation, and welcomed the attacks on those facts which might serve to release it. He hailed Chartism as 'the victory of the vanquished'; wrote enthusiastically, at the time of the American Civil War, of the support of the cause of the North given by the operatives of stricken Lancashire, seeing it as a symptom of 'moral greatness', and a 'source of unqualified happiness to those whose hopes and fears for the great interest of humanity are, as mine are, inseparably bound up with the intellectual and moral prospects of the working-classes'; he declared that, 'Given education and just laws, the poorer class would be as competent as any other class to take care of their own habits and requirements.'

As far back as 1848, in a letter to John Jay, one of his many American friends, he says, apropos of the Socialists:

> 'On many points I agree with them, and on none do I feel towards them anything but respect; thinking, on the contrary, that they are the greatest element of improvement in the present state of mankind. If the chapter (in

my *Political Economy*) in which I mention them had been written after instead of before the late Revolution on the Continent, I should have entered more fully into my opinions on Socialism, and have done it more justice.'

This omission was in part repaired in the Preface to the edition of 1852, which contains some significant words:

'It appears to me that the great end of social improvement should be to fit mankind by cultivation for a state of society combining the greatest personal freedom with that just distribution of the fruits of labour, which the present laws of property do not profess to aim at. Whether, when this state of mental and moral cultivation shall be attained, individual property in some form (though in a form very different from the present) or community of ownership in the instruments of production and a regulated division of the produce will afford the circumstance most favourable to happiness, and best calculated to bring human nature to its greatest perfection, is a question which must be left, as it safely may, to the people of that time to decide. Those of the present are not competent to decide it.'

To a German colleague, Professor Rau, of Heidelberg, he puts the same point in another way, in a letter written also in 1852:

'I confess that I regard the purely abstract investigations of political economy (beyond those elementary ones which are necessary for the correction of mischievous prejudices) as of very minor importance compared with the great practical questions which the progress of social democracy and the spread of Socialist opinions are pressing on, and for which both governing and governed classes are very far from being in a fit state of preparation.'

He did not think them ready; he thought, further,

that it would be long before they were ready. His business, as he saw it, was with questions more practical and immediate: 'I am,' he said, 'no Impracticable.' His sympathy, however, never wavered. Indeed, it grew stronger with the years and was strengthened by his wife's influence. Strengthened, not created; it was there, before he knew her.

In the famous passage in his *Autobiography*, where he sums up his opinions, and gives, as it were, his testament to the world, he describes himself as a Socialist. No one ever used words more carefully and responsibly than he did. He meant what he says, that his fundamental outlook and deepest sentiment were Socialist. He did not mean that he was in favour of an immediate Socialist programme – and that not merely because no such programme, at that date, was before him. What he says is that 'the ideal of ultimate improvement' entertained by him and his wife 'went far beyond democracy, and would class us decidedly under the general designation of Socialists'. The 'tyranny of Society over the individual which most Socialistic systems are supposed to involve' did not worry them: they knew uniformity as the major evil of a dispensation that flattened out the lives of the vast majority of men and women under the black screen of an unnecessary poverty. Unintimidated by this spectre, they looked forward to a time when 'the rule that they who do not work shall not eat will be applied not to paupers only but impartially to all'; a time when 'the division of the produce of labour . . . will be made by concert on an acknowledged principle of justice'. Workers and employers alike have got to 'learn by practice to labour and combine for generous or, at all events, for public and social purposes, and not, as

hitherto, for purely interested ones'. No difficulty of 'human nature', here; a firm insistence, rather, that the capacity for disinterested service exists now and has always existed in man. To-day social arrangements cultivate the less admirable part of human impulses, and allow the better to atrophy by disuse; but the service faculty 'is not, nor is ever likely to be, extinct. Education, habit and the cultivation of the sentiments, will make a common man dig or weave for his country as readily as fight for his country.'

> 'Interest in the common good is at present so weak a motive in the generality not because it can never be otherwise, but because the mind is not accustomed to dwell on it as it dwells from morning to night on things which tend only to personal advantage. When called into activity, as only self-interest now is, by the daily course of life, and spurred on from behind by the love of distinction and the fear of shame, it is capable of producing, even in common men, the most strenuous exertions as well as the most heroic sacrifices. The deep-rooted selfishness which forms the general character of the existing state of society is so deeply-rooted only because the whole course of existing institutions tends to foster it; and modern institutions in some respects more than ancient, since the occasions on which the individual is called on to do anything for the public without receiving its pay are far less frequent in modern life than in the smaller commonwealths of antiquity.'

The great general end is 'the union of the greatest liberty of action with a common ownership of the raw materials of the globe and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour'.

There is, certainly, nothing ambiguous about this passage. Moreover, it is entirely consistent with the

remarks in the *Political Economy*, and the other references to general social aims that occur throughout his writings. But his own flawless candour exacts from any interpreter something like it. Be it frankly admitted, therefore, that his Socialism, although perfectly definite, is, in time, remote. Its remoteness is connected first, with his optimism as to the effects of political democracy and, second, with his view that much teaching of and learning by all concerned is necessary before they are ready. 'The readiness is all.'

This point is made, with specific emphasis, in the *Three Chapters* published after his death. They are three chapters only; plainly, the entry into a larger book which one would give much to be able to read. As such, they are largely critical. The general Socialist case against the working of the capitalist order is, in the main, admitted, although it is argued that the disclosed evils are not instrinsic to capitalism. General want of freedom and the imprisonment of the poor in their poverty are stressed.

The probability that the workers will soon form a political party of their own is welcomed. Certain common errors about Socialism are 'nailed'. For instance:

> 'Socialism by no means excludes private ownership of articles of consumption. . . . The distinctive feature of Socialism is not that all things are in common, but that production is only carried on upon the common account, and that the instruments of production are held as common property.'

A curious point is that, when he talks of Socialism, Mill has always in mind the French brand; he knew the German language, though much less well than French,

but seems to have held aloof from German sociology as from German philosophy. This was a point that Brandes noted, with surprise. In his assumption that France was Europe, as in his ignorance of Germany, Mill seemed to him 'a genuine Englishman, wilful and obstinate, equipped with a singularly iron will and absolutely devoid of any flexible critical power of appropriation'. It is certainly odd that he never mentions, does not seem to have heard of, Marx.

In his second chapter, while demanding for Socialism the serious attention of statesmen and the general public, he gives a reason that is arresting:

> 'I believe that the intellectual and moral grounds of Socialism deserve the most attentive study, as affording in many cases the guiding principles of the improvements necessary to give the present economic system of society its best chance.'

In other words, Competition is far from ripe for supersession. It has, in fact, never yet been properly worked. Until it has, the complete Socialist argument, it is suggested, is premature.

Again, in the third chapter, the emphasis is on the time factor. Any form of communal ownership 'to be successful, requires a high standard of both moral and intellectual education in the members of the community'. While this does not make its introduction impossible, it does make it difficult and should make it slow.

> 'Various schemes for managing the productive resources of the country by public instead of private agency have a case for trial, and some of them may eventually establish their claims to a preference over the existing order of things; but are at present workable only by the *élite* of

mankind, and have yet to prove their power of training mankind at large to the state of improvement which they presuppose.'

The case, as left, would seem to be that, while to the end unwavering in his sympathy with Socialist principle, he thought its application required time, and also a population socially educated to a point not yet in sight.

In the meantime, there was much in the way of improving the existing system that might, and should, be undertaken by the State. Although, primarily concerned, as he was, with freedom of choice for individuals, he never amplified, with any fullness, the passages in the *Political Economy* on the limits of State interference, he did plan a second part of his *Liberty* to be devoted to the things that the community ought to do for its citizens, but at present did not do. His account of this plan gravely perturbed Grote, when he heard of it; and it was never executed. Certainly, in *Representative Government*, he argues both in favour of making the responsibility of citizens a reality and of extending real authority to government; and, even in the *Political Economy*, is ready to go a long way in limiting mere *laissez faire*. He was in favour of compulsory education, paid for and organised by the State; of State regulation of hours of labour, of State colonisation, endowment of research and public works. Significant, too, is his readiness to have the State interfere to prevent improvident marriages and control those 'domestic tyrants' who, in the name of freedom of contract, condemned their tiny children to toil for them. Of birth control he was, of course, a most ardent advocate. Can anyone doubt that were he alive to-day, he would be in favour of the public

provision of medical knowledge on this, as of a restriction of breeding from mentally and physically tainted stocks? A humanitarian, yes: a sentimentalist, no. Freedom of choice for the individual in regard to those acts that concern him alone; but no notion that every individual, regardless of character or capacity, should claim to do just as he pleased, without respect to the overriding canon of the common good. That canon stood, always.

He died in 1873. Had he lived on, into the twentieth century, there can be small question as to the side on which he would have ranged himself. His is one of the rare minds which does not prefer its own theories to the facts. To new problems and new circumstances, he would have applied a free intelligence. Able, at twenty, to see and seize the significance of the standpoint of Coleridge, which his father dismissed with scorn as mere detestable heresy; swift, in middle life, to understand, sympathise with and defend the aspirations of women, trade unionists and co-operators, in flat defiance of the economic views of his contemporaries and associates: ready, at sixty, to see and state that he had been wrong on so cardinal an economic assumption as that of the Wages Fund – he would, indubitably, have seen that capitalism has consolidated not on the lines he hoped, but on those he feared; that the marshalled forces of monopoly power, while destructive of real general freedom, are nevertheless impotent to save a world shattered and fissured into contending nationalist units by war, and starving, despite incredible advances in productive efficiency. Facts always spoke to him; alive to-day, he would see that new and concentrated productive energy is in itself an argument for

control and direction in the common interest. The incapacity of capitalism to use it; the paradoxical situation presented by planned destruction of crops, unaccompanied by any planning of distribution or of production, would convince him that to make it 'work' was a self-defeating effort. The time he asked for having run out, he would see that without the economic freedom that only social control can achieve, political self-government is incomplete, and in effect illusory. So, everything he cared for and stood for would, now, make him a Socialist, not only in sympathy but in programme.

As it is, he is miles removed from being what a recent American critic has called him, the 'arch-priest of capitalism'. That he never was. Even in his own day, he was among the makers and formers of Socialist minds; to-day, he still stands as a living reminder of the values, social, intellectual, moral and merely human, for whose realisation Socialism is required.

> 'The more prosaic our ordinary duties, the more necessary it is to keep up the tone of our minds by frequent visits to that higher region of thought and feeling, in which every work seems dignified in proportion to the ends for which, and the spirit in which, it is done; where we learn, while eagerly seeking every opportunity of exercising higher faculties and performing higher duties, to regard all work as a public function which may be ennobled by the mode of performing it – which has not, properly, any other nobility but what that gives – and which, if ever so humble, is never mean but when the motives from which it is done are mean motives.'

In this spirit, he sought a society in which workers and citizens might co-operate to a common end, accepting leadership as one form of public service and other tasks

as dignified by the spirit in which they could be done, and to the end to which they were directed. In his own day, his realism and his preference for the 'indicative mood' made him advocate the method of trial and error: and capitalism, he did not think, had yet been fully tried. To-day, he would have seen that method as exhausted. To-day, his realism would set him with those who face the fact that without economic freedom, no democratic society can exist: that its foundations are still to be laid in planned social control. In the mid-nineteenth century, he wrote:

> 'If the choice were to be made between Communism with all its chances, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it as a consequence that the produce of labour should be apportioned as we now see it, almost in an inverse ratio to the labour – the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so in a descending scale the remuneration dwindles as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessaries of life; if this, or Communism, were the alternative, all the difficulties, great and small, of Communism, would be as dust in the balance.'

He would phrase the indictment of the workings of the economic system somewhat differently, were he making it to-day; but an indictment it must be, and the conclusion follows.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOOD CITIZEN

BORN in London, Mill lived there most of his life, and was, eminently, a good Londoner. It is to him we owe the trees in Piccadilly; when it was widened by taking in a slice of the Green Park, the trees would have been cut down, had he not intervened to save them. The intervention was characteristic; he always noted what was going on in the life about him; never withdrew: never grew indifferent. He wanted toleration for the opinions of others, because he was so keen about his own. 'I have,' he told a correspondent in 1854, 'on most of the subjects interesting to mankind, opinions to which I attach importance, and which I earnestly desire to diffuse.' None of his opinions, however, were merely theoretical; he acted upon them. He was a good Londoner because he was everywhere and at all times a good citizen. Were more citizens like him, there would be no question about the working of democracy. In no passage of his writing does the whole man speak more distinctly than in this:

> 'It has often been said, and requires to be repeated still oftener, that books and discourses alone are not education; that life is a problem not a theorem; that action can be learnt only in action.'

Until the Government took over the functions of the East India Company, his occupation at India House

prevented his taking part in politics; but there was never a time at which he was not active as a writer for the papers. In his hand, the pen was a sword. Of his articles, a number are collected in the four volumes of his *Dissertations and Discussions* (which ought not to be permitted to remain out of print). They show the swift courage with which he sprang to action, in regard to a wide range of public issues.

An early and striking instance is an article of his in the *London and Westminster Review* for 1837 on Canada and Lord Durham. The famous Report in which Lord Durham advocated self-government for Canada had just been published; opinion wavered in the balance. He came out in wholehearted support of Durham, at the critical moment. Staying with the Fox family in Cornwall, he told Caroline that the *time* at which this article appeared was everything; a lead had to be given; 'if I had not been the man to do this, nobody else would.' So it proved. He gave a lead, in terms so clear and challenging that others followed. Had it not been given, and driven home by him in a second article, the fate of the Report might have been quite different; as it was, it was adopted, thanks to him, and the Canadian model has since given the form to Dominion status everywhere.

In this same year, 1837, he wrote a review of the first volume of Carlyle's French Revolution of such imaginative enthusiasm that it made the book. 'This,' he cried, 'is not so much a history as an epic poem; and notwithstanding or even in consequence of this the truest of histories. It is the history of the French Revolution and the poetry of it, both in one; and, on the whole, no work of greater genius, either historical or poetical, has been

produced in this country for many a year.' Poetry indeed, so he told Bulwer Lytton about this time, meant a great deal to him. 'I am,' he said, 'one who holds feeling at least as valuable as thought, and poetry not only on a par with, but the necessary condition of, any true and comprehensive philosophy'. He was the first critic to hail Tennyson with full appreciation. This generous faculty did not fail him, with increasing years. It was as late as 1865 that he read in the *Saturday Review* a 'middle' which so much impressed him that he was at pains to find out who the author was, and a few days later, young John Morley for the first time made his way to Blackheath. From this time on, he was a frequent visitor there, and was often present at the famous five o'clock Saturday dinners which Mill gave to his disciples – Cairnes, the economist; Lyell, the geologist; Henry Maine (whose *Ancient Law* he had recognised on its first appearance and warmly praised); Henry Fawcett; and sometimes Louis Blanc, the French Socialist. On one such occasion, Mill bade them all listen for twenty minutes, while Herbert Spencer expounded his synthetic philosophy to them.

He by no means demanded of his disciples that they should share all his views. One view there was, however, which it pained him if they did not comprehend. This was the equality of men and women. His wife deepened, she did not create, his conviction that 'in the eye of the State, one girl ought to count for exactly as much as one boy.' It did not perturb him, when he stood as candidate for Westminster, that he was described as 'the man who wants girls in Parliament'. He did want them there, and made their admission a leading point in his programme. When he got in, he encouraged the women themselves to

prepare a Petition to Parliament which he presented. He put down an amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill, on these lines. Many of his fellow members were inclined to regard the whole thing as a joke when the debate was due; they got up dinner parties, to hear the fun. His speech astounded them; it raised the issue to a wholly different plane; those who had come to scoff had to recognise that they were face to face with a fundamental question. On a division, he got less than eighty supporters to follow him into the lobby; but votes for women had, thanks to him, come right into practical politics, and stayed there. He was the wisest and most constant counsellor and friend of the first organised society for women's suffrage – the London National Women's Suffrage Society, founded in 1867. Six years earlier, he had written his book, *The Subjection of Women* – a tribute to his wife, and so he always said, largely her work. In its sustained passion and the superb march of its argument, it is regarded by some as his best piece of writing. If he delayed its issue, the reason was two-fold. He always liked to let a piece of writing lie, that he might re-read it with a truly critical eye: he also attached importance to publication at the right moment. In 1869, great propaganda efforts were organised by the supporters of the cause of women. The first public meeting on the subject was held in London, with speeches by Mill himself, Charles Kingsley, Henry Fawcett and John Morley; in that same year, the local government franchise was actually extended to them. It was the right year for a book whose opening passage is a clarion call.

> 'The object of this Essay is to explain, as clearly as I am able, the grounds of an opinion which I have held from

the very earliest period when I had formed any opinion at all on social or political matters, and which, instead of being weakened or modified, has been constantly growing stronger by the progress of reflection and the experience of life: That the principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.'

Nowhere is his belief in freedom and in individuality more vigorously set out than in the pages where he shows that the progress of humanity has been steadily away from subjection and discrimination on ground of creed, race or class, and that, in the common interest, this last barrier – that of sex – must be lowered, too. At the time of his own marriage, he wrote out a formal protest, in the most solemn terms, against the existing law in so far as it conferred on one party to the marriage-contract 'legal power and control over the person, property and freedom of the other, independent of her wishes and will', and repudiated 'all pretence to have acquired any *rights* whatsoever'. His support was tireless, and practical. Nor was it confined to the efforts to secure political freedom for women. He cared greatly for the education of girls, and gave evidence, in this sense, before the Schools Enquiry Commission of 1864: he was a steady advocate of higher education for women and subscribed towards the establishment of scholarships for them at Cambridge. At a time when many eminent persons thought the whole question of prostitution too distasteful even to mention, he supported the gallant campaign of Josephine Butler against the C.D.

Acts, and gave most effective evidence, on her side before the Royal Commission in 1871. Such legislation, he stated, was unjustifiable; 'it appears to me to be opposed to one of the greatest principles of legislation, the security of personal liberty.'

Collision with the opinion of the 'best people' he did not mind; as, in the case of Governor Eyre, when, according to his biographer, Mr. W. L. Courtney, he made himself 'notorious and unpopular'. In 1866, there was a rising among the slaves in the island of Jamaica, which was put down with sanguinary ruthlessness. Four hundred and thirty-nine persons were killed and over six hundred, women as well as men, flogged. 'A disturbance in Jamaica, provoked in the first instance, by injustice and exaggerated by rage and panic into premediated rebellion, had been the motive for taking hundreds of innocent lives by military violence, or by sentences of what were called courts martial, continuing for weeks after the brief disturbance had been put down; with many added atrocities of destruction of property, flogging women as well as men, and a general display of the brutal recklessness which usually prevails when fire and sword are let loose.' Such is his own account. The methods of the courts martial by which large numbers of persons, including Gordon, the leader of the rising, were put to death, were so high-handed, and the composition and procedure of the courts so questionable, that the Governor was actually recalled, and a Commission of Inquiry later sent out to Jamaica. Mere recall seemed to many quite insufficient. A Jamaica Committee of Protest was formed in England.

Mill, as it happened, was abroad at the time. At once, however, he sent in his name to join with Charles

Buxton, Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, Goldwin Smith and others in a cause which, very soon, was the subject of heated discussion and very strong feeling. An opposition Committee was set up, to defend Eyre and admire his prompt courage, of which Carlyle was a leading spirit, supported by Tennyson, Kingsley and Ruskin. Public opinion was excited; strong things were said on both sides. The majority was, of course, against what Sir Charles Marriott as late as 1913 (in his *England Since Waterloo*) called the 'vindictive impulses of the obstrusive humanitarians'. There was more at stake than any humanitarian impulse, however. Mill was never indifferent to cruelty and injustice, but he also had the faculty which makes the politician truly serviceable – swift perception when large issues behind particular instances.

> 'There was much more at stake than only justice to the negroes, imperative as was that consideration. The question was whether the British dependencies, and eventually perhaps Great Britain itself, were to be under the government of law, or of military licence; whether the lives and persons of British subjects are at the mercy of any two or three officers, however raw and inexperienced, or reckless and brutal, whom a panic-stricken Governor or other functionary may constitute into a so-called Court Martial. This question could only be settled by an appeal to the tribunals.

Such appeal the Committee, at his instance, decided to make. The decision caused Mr. Buxton to resign his chairmanship, although continuing heart and soul in the work; Mill, thereupon, was unanimously chosen to act in his stead. In that capacity, he had to represent the Committee in the House of Commons; to put constant questions, and, when a debate was secured, to speak.

The speech he made on the Eyre issue was, by him, regarded as the best he delivered in the House.

For more than two years, the Committee laboured to get Eyre put in the dock. On the first application for a warrant for his arrest as accessory to the murder of Gordon, the Shropshire magistrates dismissed the case; at Bow Street a Grand Jury threw out the Bill against him. But the Lord Chief Justice, Cockburn, made a charge which is historic. He stated that the evidence on which Gordon had been condemned and executed by court martial was such as could not possibly have been admitted under any known rules of evidence and that not of ordinary evidence merely, but of military law. His exposition was of crucial importance for the future, and in securing this authoratitive declaration of the law, the Committee rendered a lasting service to their country. In their immediate object they failed; but they showed that in Great Britain a body of opinion existed, alert to defend the claims of justice irrespective of colour, creed or class. To future colonial governors, an impressive warning was given. At the time, they were in a minority; but not long after, T. H. Green, the philosopher, said that on this matter he had rather have been Mill than Carlyle.

On the big international issues that arose during his lifetime, Mill's attitude was invariably large and generous. Nor did he dry up, with age, in any degree. He was one of the few Englishmen who was, from the first, and quite openly, on the side of the North in the American Civil War. When the Franco-Prussian War came in 1870, he withstood the tide of pro-French feeling that ran high in London: urged the placing of Alsace Lorraine under an international guarantee and argued

strongly against treaties with penal clauses of more than a specified and strictly limited duration. In a striking paper, in the *Edinburgh* for 1870, he condemns in advance the type of instrument drawn up at Versailles in 1919; and goes far to anticipate the ideal of the League of Nations:

> 'One great principle one can clearly see, and it is the only one that need concern us at present. *The community of nations is essentially a republic of equals.* Its purposes require that it should know no distinction of grades, no rights and privileges enjoyed by some and refused to others. The basis of international law – without which the weak, for whose protection it chiefly exists, would never be secure – *is, that the smallest and least powerful nation, in its capacity of nation, is the equal of the strongest.* Whatever rights belong to one, belong to all, and can only be temporarily forfeited, even by misconduct, unless the erring nation is treated as a savage, and thrust out of the community of civilised nations altogether. Now, all Treaties which bind a nation, within itself, and in its own affairs, by restrictions not common to all the rest, violate this principle. Of this nature is a stipulation that a country shall maintain one form of government and abjure another; that she shall abstain from fortifying places within her own territory; that she shall limit to a prescribed amount her army or her fleet, or the portion of each stationed in a particular part of her dominions, no equivalent limitation of armaments being consented to by the other parties to the Treaty, or by nations in general.'

The events of half a century have made some of his arguments seem out of date; this, alas, is even more relevant, to-day, than when he penned it.

When Mill consented to stand for the House of Commons in 1865, he was animated solely by a sense of public duty. Whether or no he enjoyed his three and a

half years at St. Stephen's is a question almost irrelevant; it is doubtful whether, after the loss of his wife, he found or expected enjoyment anywhere. His defeat, in November, 1868, called forth a significant letter from one of his old associates in the Speculative Society. Bishop Thirlwall, writing to a friend, says:

> 'The most remarkable event of the Election, so far, is Mill's loss of his seat. Only to think that nothing could have shaken it if only he would have kept quiet, and not gone out of his way to give offence to his friends. And yet they were all noble and generous errors, such as no cold-blooded or not scrupulously conscientious and self-sacrificing man would have committed. People who only knew him by his literary character supposed him to be a man of cool temperament. He is, evidently, like Gladstone – in whom for a time it was as little discerned – a man of vehemently passionate susceptibility: the snow covers a volcano.'

Among the actions that had given 'needless offence' to his constituents was his subscription to Bradlaugh's election expenses. He did not agree with Bradlaugh's religious opinions, but he thought that opinions, no matter how few held them, ought, if sincere, to be voiced. His concern for minorities was constant; it made him an active supporter of Proportional Representation, in and out of season. But the real interest of the Bishop's letter is in the comparison he draws between Mill and Gladstone, in their 'passionate susceptibility' and the fact, in either case, that a volcano slumbered beneath the snow.

Gladstone wrote in 1889 a letter about Mill as an M.P. in which he dwells on his 'singular moral elevation', and says:*

* *Life of J. S. Mill.* W. L. Courtney.

'I remember now that at that time, more than twenty years back, I used to call him the Saint of Rationalism, a phrase roughly and partially expressing what I now mean. Of all the motives, stings and stimulants that reach men through their egoism in Parliament, no part could move or touch him. His conduct and language were, in that respect, a sermon. Again, though he was a philosopher, he was not, I think a man of crotchets. He had, I think, the good sense and practical tact of politics, together with the high independent thought of a recluse. I need not tell you that, for the sake of the House of Commons at large, I rejoiced in his advent and deplored his disappearance. He did us all good. In whatever party, whatever form of opinion, I sorrowfully confess that such men are rare.'

Oratory was not, of course, his *forte*; of his speaking, indeed, Mr. Gladstone says that 'it came physically as from a statue'. It was the mind and the personality, that impressed; it was that Gladstone tried to express when he called him the Saint of Rationalism. The phrase is at once right and wrong.

He had not only the purity and integrity of personal life, he had the passion, the fire beneath the snow, that make the active saint. But he was not wholly a Rationalist. In his youth, as he told Morley, mere negation of religion was a firm bond of union, social and otherwise, between men who agreed on nothing else. For him, that mere negation was done with in the crisis of his mental history. He was at no time 'anxious to propagate my uncertainties'; only gradually did the outline of some more positive belief grow clear. When, in 1836, he wrote to a friend that he 'held feeling at least as valuable as thought, and poetry not only on a par with but the necessary condition of, any comprehensive philosophy', he meant it. In an early letter to Carlyle, he tells

him, 'You I look upon as an artist. . . . The highest destiny of all lies in that direction, for it is the artist alone in whose hands truth becomes impressive and a living principle of action'. This was in 1832: thirty-five years later, he speaks to the students of St. Andrew's of art, where 'perfection is itself the object', as part of the higher education.

But the movement of his mind went beyond this. Standing by the death-bed of his brother in 1837, he accepted, with a simple but serious 'Yes', the word of Dr. Calvert – 'This sort of scene puts an end to Reason, and Faith begins'. To Caroline Fox at the same period, he said, in words as fully meant as any he uttered, 'No one should attempt to benefit his age without first making a stern resolution to take up his cross and bear it.' As he grew older, above all, as the death of his wife compelled him to penetrate more deeply into his own mind, he found there, as Wordsworth did, 'something far more deeply interfused', which reason could not wholly plumb or measure. His realisation that experience could be lit by intuition: his sense that the truth was not seized, nor could be presented, in its entirety, by logical syllogisms, now assumed a meaning. The belief in divine unity which he had accepted with Carlyle, but coldly, now began to glow. He did not, ever, accept the notion of a personal God nor of His omnipotence; on immortality he wrote, with an insight that is touching in its revelation of personal experience:

> 'I cannot but think that, as the condition of mankind becomes improved, as they grow happier in their lives, and more capable of deriving happiness from useful sources, they will care less for this flattering expectation. It is not, naturally or generally, the happy who are most

anxious either for a prolongation of the present life or for a life hereafter; it is those who have never been happy. They who have had their happiness can bear to part with existence; but it is hard to die without ever having lived.'

This passage occurs in the second of those *Three Essays on Religion*, published after his death, which surprised and even shocked some, like Morley, who thought that they had known Mill through and through. Yet they are, really, entirely consistent with what had gone before, as with the atmosphere of the *Autobiography*. Above all, with the parts of it that touch on his feeling for his wife. That feeling was, for him, a key to unlock many secret places in himself and in the mind of man; those who would prefer to slide over it can never understand him, as a man. In the *Essays*, again, anything that may seem exaggerated in the optimism about human destiny that he elsewhere expresses, as in the confident expectations from the workings of political democracy that read somewhat ironically to-day, is corrected; since he here brings into the forefront that other aspect of life never absent from his own consciousness. Here, while firmly rejecting miracles, and finding that 'the whole domain of the supernatural' must be 'removed from the domain of Belief into that of simple Hope', he finds Hope 'legitimate and philosophically defensible. . . . It makes life and human nature a far greater thing to the feelings, and gives greater strength as well as greater solemnity to all the sentiments which are awakened in us by our fellow creatures and by mankind at large.' In a famous passage which gave deep offence to the Rationalists, he says that

'The power of the Creator once recognised as limited,

there is nothing to disprove the supposition that his goodness is complete and that the ideally perfect character in whose likeness we should wish to form ourselves and to whose supposed approbation we refer our actions, may have a real existence as a Being to whom we owe all such good as we enjoy.'

He goes on to argue that even 'the absolute unbeliever now possesses, and there can never be lost to humanity,' the standard of excellence and model for imitation held up by Christ:

'Whatever else may still be taken away from us by rational criticism Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. . . . About the life and sayings of Jesus, there is a stamp of absolute originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very front rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life. When to this we add that, to the conception of the rational sceptic, it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be – not God, for he never made the smallest pretension to that character, and would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous as it seemed to the men who condemned him – but a man charged with a special, express, and

unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue; we may well conclude that the influences of religion on the character which will remain after rational criticism has done its utmost against the evidences of religion, are well worth preserving, and that what they lack in direct strength as compared with those of a firmer belief, is more than compensated by the greater truth and rectitude of the morality they sanction.'

His last word, in the *Autobiography*, is that a true system, whether of philosophy or of social science, is 'something much more comprehensive and many-sided than I had previously had any idea of.' To the students of St. Andrew's, his final word was the rejection of any rewards, here or hereafter, save

'The one reward that will never fail you, and which may be called disinterested, because it is not a consequence but is inherent in the very fact of deserving it: the deeper and more varied interest you will feel in life, which will give it ten-fold its value, and a value that will last to the end. All merely personal objects grow less valuable as we advance in years; this not merely endures but increases.'

Mill must be read, not taken, still less left, on anyone's poor words about him. Then, the reader meets a man contact with whom fortifies faith in human character and renews respect for the capacity of the free mind.

From the grim repressions of his childhood he carried over, into adult life, a shy sensibility that made him, at times, angular. Geniality was not in him: nor lightness. Carlyle's endorsement of Sterling's 'saw-dustish' comes sometimes to the mind, as it peruses his pages. Yet, if there is little colour there, and no sparkle, there is something else – a clear lambency that carries with it a sense

of entire confidence. Never, as man or as writer, does Mill let one down. Never, as man or as writer, is he less than generous, candid and of a truthfulness that gives new meaning to the word. Nor is his light a chilly one: a burning intensity lives in its quiet and steady flame. Carlyle spoke truly, too, when he said that no surgeon could touch sore places with a softer hand; he has the sympathy born of intimate acquaintance with pain, To those who knew him, his personality gave added force to his writing; even to us, who knew him not, the sense of a knight without fear or reproach, as Alexander Herzen called him, comes from his pages: a knight constantly on crusade, whose gentleness is perfect as his courage. Who else springs as surely to the mind when it recalls Plato's description of what citizens the best states should be composed? 'We said that the guardians should be gifted with a passionate and also with a philosophical temper and that this would be the true way of making them gentle to their friends and fierce to their enemies.'

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About the author of this book

MARY AGNES HAMILTON, daughter of Robert Adamson, Professor of Logic at Manchester, Aberdeen, and Glasgow, was educated in Glasgow, Germany, and Cambridge, where she specialised in Economics. She is the author of a number of novels and translations, and of biographies, of which the more recent are the life of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and a study of Thomas Carlyle, whose friendship with Mill makes an interesting chapter here.

As Labour M.P. for Blackburn from 1929-31, she was a Member of the British Delegation to the League of Nations Assembly, and Parliamentary Secretary to the P.M.G. She is now a Governor of the B.B.C.

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